

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: MIND THE GAP: CONNECTING NEWS AND INFORMATION TO
BUILD AN ANTI-RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT AGENDA IN
INDIA

Pallavi Guha, Doctor of Philosophy, 2017

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This dissertation will examine the use of news media and social media platforms by feminist activists in building an anti-rape and sexual assault agenda in India. Feminist campaigns need to resonate and interact with the mainstream media and social media simultaneously to reach broader audiences, including policymakers, in India. For a successful feminist campaign to take off in a digitally emerging country like India, an interdependence of social media conversations and news media discussions is necessary. The study focuses on the theoretical framework of agenda building, digital feminist activism, and hybridization of the media system. The study will also introduce the still-emerging concept of interdependent agenda building to analyze the relationship between news media and social media. This concept proposes the idea of an interplay of information between traditional mass media and social media, by focusing not just on one media platform, but on multiple platforms simultaneous in this connected world. The methodology of the study includes in-depth interviews with thirty-five feminist activists and thirty journalists; thematic analysis of 550 newspaper reports of three rapes and murders from 2005-2016; and social media analysis of three Facebook feminist pages to understand and analyze the impact of social media on news media coverage of rape and the combined influence

of media platforms on anti-rape feminist activism. The introduction of social media platforms in newsroom influence coverage of rape and sexual assault on women, and assess the reasons behind selective media and public outrage against rape and sexual assault. In this dissertation, I also focus on the intersectional identity of feminist activists and how they align their offline anti-rape activism and inequalities of caste, gender, class, digital access and literacy.

As a recommendation of this study, I created a beta version of an app, which will support anti-rape feminist activism and rape coverage by bridging the information and coverage gap of rape and sexual assault.

MIND THE GAP:
CONNECTING NEWS AND INFORMATION TO BUILD AN ANTI-RAPE AND SEXUAL
ASSAULT AGENDA IN INDIA

by

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Dedication

Pathorkuchir moto meye (A girl with a firmness of stonewort)

Ashapura Devi (1909-1995),

translated by Dipannita Datta

I dedicate my work to all women, who have been resolute to fight sexual violence despite their personal trials and tribulations.

Foreword

My story is the story of women in every country. And many more in number are those stories which are not written on paper, but are written on the bodies and minds of women.

Kala Gulab Te Hazare Di Mitti, Amrita Pritam (1919-2005)

Acknowledgement

Who is Helping You, don't forget them: Swami Vivekananda

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“We will continue to fight against rape and violence on women. We are not afraid of anyone because we are doing right. Men can’t just abuse us and go unpunished, we are for every sister in our village.”

I don’t claim to be the voice of feminist activists like Sutapa, who provided me with the quote above. But I do want to tell the stories of women and girls, who have come together to build an agenda against sexual harassment and rape in India. Some of them have relied on the news media and social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, to engage in public and political discourse on anti-rape activism.

With the growth of digital communication platforms, feminist activists are increasingly more vocal about harassment and abuse. Like many women in India, I can remember the countless times when I have experienced sexual harassment but been at a loss as to how to react. Other than reprimanding the offender, there is little that I have done; there were no social media platforms to publicize incidents, and media reporting on sexual harassment and rape was limited. Looking back, I think if I had had a smartphone I would have taken pictures of the perpetrators and posted them online. However, in the past two decades, communication and its technologies have evolved dynamically. The introduction and rise of the Internet, political blogs, and social media networks have changed the media landscape as well as the relationship between the different forms of media (Bekkers et al, 2011). The Internet, and specifically the various social

media networks¹, have emerged as a global platform for transnational feminist activism (Schuster, 2013; Munro; 2013). Online feminist activism has resulted in campaigns such as SlutWalk, pink chaddi (pink underwear)², Hollaback, and others.

According to Munro (2013), the Internet is emerging as a vital space for feminist activism. But we also cannot overlook the fact that the Internet is a vulnerable space for feminist activists (Hess, 2014). According to a study conducted by U.N. Women and the U.N. Broadband Commission in 2015³, 73% of women have been victims of online hate and violence. Munro (2013), Schuster (2013), and others have focused their research on online feminist activism in American and Western European countries, where Internet penetration and literacy is far greater compared to emerging Asian economies such as India, China, and the Philippines. Despite scholars hailing social media platforms as spaces for marginalized groups, the trend of perpetuating online hate violence against women is universal (Cyber violence against women and girls, 2015).

¹ A social networking service is an online service, platform, or site that focuses on facilitating the building of social networks or social relations among people who, for example, share interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections. A social network service consists of a representation of each user (often a profile), his/her social links, and a variety of additional services. Most social network services are web-based and provide the means for users to interact over the Internet, such as email and instant messaging. Online community services are sometimes considered as social networks, although social network service usually means an individual-centered service whereas online community services are group-centered. Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, activities, events, and interests within their individual networks. (Mashable)

² The campaign spearheaded in Bangalore, 2009, against a right wing religious group which attacked women in a pub in order to 'defend' the Indian culture from 'westernization'. A group of women started the campaign and invited people who disagreed with the religious group to send the leader of the group pink underwear. They used blogs, emails and Facebook to popularize this campaign.

(<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/feb/15/india-gender>)

³ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/9/cyber-violence-against-women-and-girls>

According to independent sources such as the IAMAI⁴ (Internet & Mobile Association of India) and the ITU⁵ (International Telecommunication Union), the estimated Internet penetration in India in November 2015 was approximately 30%. Around 45% of all Internet users accessed online content through mobile devices in 2014, which increased to 60% in 2015. Low cost smart phones and cheap mobile phone tariffs have potentially increased Internet penetration in Indian rural hinterlands (IAMAI-KPMG, 2015). Despite this increase, the digital divide⁶ and digital literacy⁷ remain critical issues in India.

While social media platforms undeniably provide women and feminists with the means to collaborate and create awareness in order to take a campaign forward (Eslon-Ziya, 2013), to get a wider cross-section of the population involved, feminist activism needs the support of the news media. This is shown clearly by the digital activism surrounding the gang rape of a paramedical student, Jyoti Singh Pandey, in New Delhi on December 16, 2012. In Pandey's case, the hashtag #Nirbhaya (meaning fearless in Hindi) was given to the victim by the country's leading English daily, *The Times of India*, and became a popular trending hashtag in late 2012 and early 2013. This hashtag and the surrounding social media activism were picked up by the Indian media and eventually resulted in a major campaign by the mainstream media against the rape and sexual abuse of women in India. Indeed, in order to get citizens involved, developing a bridge between mainstream media and social media activism is important. Aikat

⁴ Internet and Mobile Association of India: The Internet & Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) is a not-for-profit industry association, which addresses the issues, concerns and challenges of the Internet and Mobile economy and takes a leading role in its development. (<http://www.iamai.in/aboutus>)

⁵ International Telecommunication Union: ITU is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies – ICTs. (<http://www.itu.int/en/about/Pages/default.aspx>)

⁶ The idea of the "digital divide" refers to the growing gap between the underprivileged members of society, especially the poor, rural, elderly, and handicapped portion of the population who do not have access to computers or the internet; and the wealthy, middle-class, and young Americans living in urban and suburban areas who do have access. (<http://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/cs201/projects/digital-divide/start.html>)

⁷ Digital literacy is the ability to find, evaluate, utilize, share, and create content using information technologies and the Internet. (Cornell University Digital Literacy Resource)

(2016) explains how mass media platforms in India incorporate social media content in news broadcasts or articles and claims that news reports routinely monitor social media for protests, because activists have found these to be a space where they can freely voice their opinions.

However, there are pitfalls if feminist activists concentrate their focus exclusively on traditional news media platforms since the latter fail to adequately cover feminist activism in their coverage (Mendes, 2015). Mendes (2015) specifically cites the global media coverage of the *SlutWalk* movement to demonstrate the negative coverage of feminism and feminist activism, arguing that *The Times of India*, and other Indian newspapers, criticized *SlutWalk* as a frivolous movement that was diluting the feminist movement (Mendes, 2015). Some campaigns have received considerable media coverage in India and others have been relegated to the background.

Based on these considerations, I question whether focusing on the Internet is adequate for feminist activists to build a public and political agenda around sexual assault on women in India. I argue that feminist campaigns need to resonate and interact with the mainstream media in order to reach larger audiences, including policymakers, in India. For instance, the #Nirbhaya campaign resonated with the online as well as offline publics in India, which contributed to its popularity (Guha, 2015b). For a successful feminist campaign to take off, an interdependence of social media conversations and news media discussions is necessary. On a similar note, Harlow and Guo (2014) and Aikat (2016) posit that social media activism needs the mainstream news media platform to propagate their activism. Harlow and Guo (2014) focus on the concept of a *protest paradigm* employed by the mainstream mass media, “What is new is that digital communication tools serve to add new elements to the ‘protest paradigm’”. In this Digital Era, the dynamics of e-votes or e-signatures via SNS might constitute a ‘protest paradigm 2.0.’ (pp.473).

It was the reaction to the brutal gang rape in Delhi in 2012 that provoked the surge in academic literature relating to social media activism on violence against women in India. The focus of this research has been the use of social media networks as a platform for protest, the mobilization of public opinion, and raising awareness, and the use of social media networks as sources for journalists (Rao, 2014; Mishra & Krishnaswami, 2014). In particular, as I discuss in my literature review, scholars have emphasized the increase in online public engagement on the incidences of violence against women in India. Other studies include the coverage of sexual violence against women in India by Western and Indian publications, and the news ethics of the media coverage of violence against women and others. Yet, there remains a dearth of research on the uses of media by feminist activists in building an agenda on issues of sexual violence in India.

Police reports on rape and sexual assault in India have been on the rise in the past decade. The National Crime Records Bureau reports that there has been an increase of 52.2 % in the incidence of rape reporting from 2002-2012. In the case of sexual assault, the increase from 2002-2012 has been 33.6%. This increase in the reporting of rape and sexual assault continued until 2014. According to the latest data from the NCRB of India there has been a slight decrease in the reporting of incidents of rape and sexual assault in 2015, as compared to the previous year (see Appendix 3). Sexual assaults and rape constitute 20.3% of the overall crime rate. The rate of filing charges (the number of cases investigated that were officially documented) in incidences of rape and attempt to rape is 96.1% and 91.7%, which is much higher than for crimes of robbery (64.3%), murder (86%), and kidnapping and abduction (68%) (See Appendix 2). The conviction rate in cases of sexual assault and rape has remained dismally low at 29.4% for rapes and 19.8% for attempt to rapes. The conviction rates for robbery (31.6%) and murder (39.5%) are higher

than for sexual offences. The data points to a wide gap between the rate of filing for sexual assault against women and the rate of conviction. Victims are encouraged to file a report⁸ with the police, but a majority of the offenders are not convicted due to a lack of proper investigation, humiliation of victims during the medical and judicial procedure, and long drawn out judiciary proceedings (Himabindu et al, 2014).

There has been an increased focus by the media and by online feminist campaigns on the issues of rape and sexual assault in India (Gangoli & Rew, 2015); however, the conviction data indicates that they are not having enough of an impact on policymakers to bring about widespread changes in policy. There has been no sustained media campaign on the implementation of policies such as rape crisis centers, fast track courts, providing rehabilitation, or security for the victims (Himabindu et al, 2014). Unfortunately, there has been no decrease in the incidence of rape and sexual assault and neither have the media or scholars taken the issue forward with respect to other rape or sexual assault cases. The clock seems to have stopped in 2012 for discussions regarding the framing and news coverage of rape and sexual assault victims. I suggest that feminist activists should use the multiple platforms of the news media and social media to build a sustained campaign on rape and sexual assault. This will support the building of a public and policy agenda against rape and sexual assault. Social media has fostered a sense of hybrid protest (where social media pressure fosters more traditional media attention) and an interdependence of both could build social capital to tackle the issue of violence against women with impunity more broadly.

For this dissertation, I talked with 35 Indian feminist activists and 30 journalists from metro cities, towns and villages. This helped me understand their challenges and successes in

⁸ Known as F.I.R (first information report) in India.

creating a public and political agenda on rape and sexual violence against women. I had in-depth and enriching conversations with my interviewees and without these candid truthful dialogues I would not have known of the struggles of feminist activists from villages in India. Anita, a feminist activist said, “Every time there is a rape or sexual violence in our village, we get together and demand action from the police. We have been threatened, abused and dissuaded by the local leaders but we have been resolute in most occasions. All we want is justice for the abused woman.”

This dissertation will introduce the interdependent agenda building theory, which emphasizes the interdependence of social media networks and mainstream mass media to build a public and political agenda. To explicate this theory, it is imperative to focus on and develop the seminal theory of agenda setting and agenda building. Specifically, this study examines the following research questions:

Research Questions

RQ1: How do feminist activists use social media platforms to build a public and political agenda against rape and sexual harassment/assault in India?

RQ 2: How do feminist activists network with journalists to build a public and political agenda against rape and sexual harassment/assault in India?

RQ3: Which media platforms are advantageous for feminist activists to build an agenda on issues of rape and sexual assault?

RQ4: What is the impact of social media on the nature of news media coverage on rape and sexual assault?

RQ 5: What are the patterns of mainstream media coverage of rape?

RQ 6: How did the feminist activist groups use Facebook to build public agenda on rapes of Jyoti Singh Pandey and Jisha?

Chapter 2 synthesizes the literature on agenda building, digital activism and hybrid media. I will also explain the connection among the three theories and their contribution to my study. At the end of the chapter, I will discuss the contribution of my study.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the various methods I incorporated in this dissertation. It includes qualitative interviews, thematic analysis of newspaper articles, and social media analysis of feminist groups on Facebook. The chapter also incorporates the various ethical dilemmas and challenges I faced during the course of this study.

Chapter 4 describes the experiences of the research participants. The feminist activists describe their successes and the challenges of anti-rape activism, while the journalists talk about issues in the newsroom which influence rape and anti-rape activism coverage.

Chapter 5 assesses the newspaper coverage of three specific rape incidents in India, along with network analysis of feminist activist groups on Facebook.

Chapter 6 provides the key take-aways from this study and introduces and describes in detail my theory of interdependent agenda building. The chapter also includes recommendations for journalists and feminist activists to build an anti-rape and sexual harassment agenda. As part of the recommendations, I introduce a mobile application that I created as a tool for journalists and activists to build this agenda. The chapter ends with conclusions and a discussion of the limitations and potential future courses of this study.

The history of feminist activism and news media in India

In this segment, I first discuss the origins and nature of the feminist movement in India. This is followed by an examination of the news coverage of the feminist movement. Third, I

explore cyber feminist activism in India. Finally, I will discuss how this background knowledge is significant for this study.

Few Indian women are strangers to sexual harassment, molestation, and other sex crimes (Guha, 2015a; Singh, 2017). Although women are now more visible in public spaces, they continue to be harassed and violated (Nair, 2017; Guha, 2015b). Despite the growing influence of western ideas in metro cities, violence against women remains deeply rooted within India's patriarchal society (Shiva, 2017). The patriarchal, discriminatory view of women as the lesser sex, the lack of police and judicial support for assaulted women, and the general contempt of women's liberation creates a misunderstood view of feminism (Shenomics, 2016; Himabindu et al, 2014). This ranges from feminists being man hating, sex hating and depraved to angry bra-burners (Madhok, 2015). Feminist activists are also infamously known as 'feminazis' (Shenomics, 2016; Thomas, 2006).

Historical background of feminism in India

The women's movement in India traces its genesis to 19th century colonial India (Ray, 1999; Kumar, 1993) with issues such as the abolition of Sati⁹ and widow remarriage representing the core of the movement (Kumar, 1993). Surprisingly prominent male scholars and educationists like Vidyasagar and Ram Mohan Roy led these women's movements (Ray, 1999).

The Indian independence movement influenced the early 20th century women's movement in India (Kumar, 1993). Women participated in the independence movement and demanded equality of sexes along with the independence of the country (Ray, 1999; Kumar, 1993). After the achievement of independence in 1947, the women's movement became more

⁹ Sati was the practice of immolation of the widow in the pyre of her husband. (Ray, 1993)

focused on issues of gender equality. with feminist activists demanding equal rights and social justice for all women, including poor and lower caste women, and asserted that biological differences between sexes should not create unequal public and private spaces for men and women.

During the 1970s and after, the women's movement in India was inspired by feminist ideals from Anglo-western countries in Europe and America (Nagar, 2000; Kumar, 1993). It was during this time that the women's movement in India became the feminist movement (Kumar, 1993). The movement saw a rise in the awareness of inequalities based on intersectional identities such as caste, class, religions, region, language and tribe (Ray, 1999; Nagar, 2000). There was an increased focus on women's right to control their own bodies, and on issues of violence against women, such as rape, dowry, domestic violence, regionalism, communalism, and others (Nagar, 2000). Feminist activists also focused on the sexual harassment and sexual violence experienced by women in both public and private spheres during the 1970s and 1980s (Patel & Kajuria, 2016; Nagar, 2000).

The growing focus on rape and sexual assault on women in the 1970s and 1980s was driven at least partly by an infamous rape case in which a tribal teenage girl Mathura¹⁰ was gang raped inside a police station by more than three policemen (Patel & Kajuria, 2016; Kazenstein, 1989). After eight years of legal deliberation, the Supreme Court of India stated in its judgment that Mathura had not been raped but consented to have sex with the men (Patel & Kajuria, 2016; Napeune, 2014). Feminist activists protested against the decision to exonerate the police officers and the movement demanded a review of the judgment in the Mathura case. This forced the Indian government to amend India's existing rape laws, which had previously put the burden of

¹⁰ Mathura was identified in the media and other legal archives by her first name only.

proof on the victim (Patel & Kajuria, 2016; Nagar, 2000). Similarly, feminist activists also protested against the rape of Rameeza Bee of Hyderabad and Maya Tyagi of Delhi, who were also raped while they were in police custody (Kaizenstein, 1989). The amendment of the rape laws was a watershed moment for Indian feminist activism and rape laws in India. Thus, the Mathura anti-rape activism consolidated the feminist movement in India and also amended the existing rape laws.

By the 1990s however, left-leaning women activists criticized India's feminist movement for focusing on so-called "bourgeois," concerns such as seeking political legitimacy and attention from policymakers (Kaizenstein, 1989). The left-leaning feminists swayed the course of the Indian feminist movement in becoming more inclusive of class, caste and religious identities (Patel & Kajuria, 2016). This decade also witnessed the rise of the political feminist movement, where women demanded political reservation¹¹ in local and national government (Patel & Kajuria, 2016; Kumar, 1993).

Since 2000, there has been increasing emphasis on the rights of the LGBTQ community (along with a continued focus on rape and sexual harassment of women). Compared to the older women's organizations, which had an elitist and classist bias and which inclined to operate within the existing social order, newer feminist activists and organizations have tended to embrace the struggles of all women irrespective of sexuality, class, caste and religion (Patel & Kajuria, 2016)

Heterogeneity in feminist activism

¹¹ The quota system or reservation in India is equivalent to affirmative action. For more details, see: <http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2013/06/affirmative-action>

The Indian feminist movement is both ideologically and structurally heterogeneous. According to Roy (2015), the contemporary Indian feminist movement is comprised of urban and rural organizations, and of national, international and transnational academics and activists from different socio-economic strata, although the leadership of the Indian feminist movement largely rests with women belonging to the upper and upper middle classes.

Moreover, feminist activists engage with women's issues in relation to the myriad identities of class, linguistic, religious, ethnicity and caste that define Indian polity (Roy, 2015). On this heterogeneity of feminist activism in India, Karzenstein (1989) writes, "The feminist movement in India tends to be multi-associational, ideologically diverse, regionally broad, and concerned with a vast array of issues." (pp. 55). Karzenstein (1989) further argues, "This diversity is echoed in the ideological character and political concerns of the movement. Organizational agendas span the range from reformist to radical and target a broad range of concerns from the economic livelihood of poor women to sexual violence across social groups" (pp.60).

Kumar (1993) and Kazenstein (1989) identify six types of feminist activist group in India. The six types of feminist activist group are combines from Kumar (1993) and Kazenstein (1989) These are:

1. Political Party-Affiliated Women's Organizations – These are women's organizations which are affiliated to various Indian political parties. For example, the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC) is associated with the Congress Party and the Mahila Dakshata Samiti was created as a women's wing of the Janata Party in 1978. Although these organizations claim to be apolitical like AIWC, they are governed by the beliefs of the political parties with whom they are connected.

2. Autonomous Women's Groups – Seeking to distinguish themselves from politically affiliated women's groups, starting in the 1970's, many women organized themselves into autonomous groups focusing on issues of violence against women, equal pay, and opportunities. These groups have their own mandates and principles. However, individual members could have political affiliations thus making the distinction between party-linked and autonomous groups ambiguous as with the National Conference of Women's movements (Sinha, 2007). *Swayam*, based in Kolkata, is an example of an autonomous women's group that has no political affiliation. *Swayam*, is one of the oldest and largest non-profits in West Bengal.

3. Grass Roots Organizations – Women at the grass-roots level have also played an important part in the feminist movement. Some examples of grass roots organizations are the *Chipko* movement (the famous tree hugging movement, where people would hug trees to save them from cutting) and the *Shramik Sanghatana* movement (the labor movement), through which tribal women protested against harassment, domestic violence, and alcohol consumption by men.

4. Women's Research Institutes – Since the 1970s, many academic and policy institutes studying issues related to women have been advocating for women's rights. These include: the Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) in New Delhi; the Institute of Social Studies Trust; the Indian Social Institute Programme for Women's Development, in Bombay; and the Research Centre for Women's Studies, which is associated with the SNDT Women's University in Bombay.

5. Women's Development Organizations – There has been a rise in the number of feminist NGOs since the 1970s. These are largely urban organizations that work on various issues related to women. However, as Roy (2015) and Katzenstein (1989) point out, women's development organizations are controversial. Roy (2015) notes, “NGOs constitute controversial actors within

the feminist political field especially as they become, on the one hand, key players and, on the other, less representative of a specific kind of feminist politics in becoming more transnationalized and professionalized.” This culture of professionalized hierarchy and discrimination against grassroots workers is also evident in the book “Sangtin Yatra,” (English version: *Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism Through Seven Lives in India*) written by the Sangtin writers (NGO workers in India) and Richa Nagar.

6. Numerous "old" and "new" voluntary organizations – These are the religious, caste, ethnic, and nonsectarian organizations that offer voluntary services to poor women, such as training for employment, legal aid, health clinics, etc. Although these volunteer groups are aimed at low-income women, there are also projects aimed at middle-class women, such as raising funds to build a hostel for working women in urban areas.

Of these groups, the politically affiliated feminist groups have the financial, political and other resources for mass demonstrations and protests. But their political affiliation makes them less credible. Instead it is the autonomous groups who “have acute political savvy and connections to professional, media, and governmental circles, which enable them to politicize issues with an effectiveness that belies their numerical ‘insignificance’” (Kazenstein, 1989, pp. 60).

Although these organizations extend their support to victims of violence irrespective of their class, caste and religion, the plight of lower class and caste women doesn’t get the same media, political and judicial focus (UN report, 2013). Some autonomous organizations extend their support to the subaltern women but they rarely get attention from the public, media, political leaders or judiciary.

Indeed, violence against subaltern women still rarely receives the kind of focus as violence against privileged women; whenever the political parties or state are affiliated to a women's groups, violence against subaltern women is rarely prioritized (Roy, 2015). Perhaps it is for this reason that when a political leader is involved in rape or sexual harassment, the issue hardly leads anywhere, as in the infamous Suryanelli case, in which a political leader was accused of rape and trafficking. In 1996, a 16-year-old girl from Suryanelli, Kerala was abducted and raped by 42 men for over 40 days (Jacob, 2013). Prominent political leaders were accused of raping the victim. After 18 years and many lower court acquittals, 24 of the 42 men were convicted but the Indian Supreme Court doubted the rape claim of the victim (Jacob, 2013). "The survivor of the Suryanelli rape case lamented that 'no one ever gave me a name like Nirbhaya or Amanat.... I will never be the nation's pride or the face of women wronged.'" (Losh, 2014). This clearly indicates that there is selective outrage by the media, where it carefully selects its 'victims' to lead the coverage and the agenda (Arora, 2014). Much of the outrage also depends on the Indian media system. The following section will give an overview of how the Indian media evolved from the colonial era to the post-liberalization era of the 1990s and its impact on coverage of feminist activism.

Brief history of Indian news media

The Indian news media initially emerged in the 18th century during the British colonial rule (Thomas, 2006). The British colonizers set up the first English language press in India, followed later by other newspapers in English and regional languages established by Indian industrialists and educationists (Rodrigues & Ranganathan, 2015). The leading newspapers during the pre-and post-independent India were *The Times of India*, *The Hindustan Times* and

The Hindu (Thomas, 2006). The Indian press was a pillar of support for the Indian independence movement.

After independence, the Indian news media industry has exercised relative freedom compared to its neighbors, such as Pakistan, Myanmar (Rana, 2014). However, during the Indian emergency of 1975, declared by the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi, there was unprecedented censorship of the press for two years (Rodrigues & Ranganathan, 2015; Tarlo, 2003).

The Indian news media industry has seen tremendous growth since economic reforms in 1991 leading to increased privatization of organizations, new communications technology, and the establishment of India's position as a global market and economy (Bhargavi et al., 2015; Rodrigues & Ranganathan, 2015). India constitutes the largest market for newspapers in the world, followed by China and Japan (Bhargavi et al., 2015). The growth of Indian regional news media revolutionized the Indian print news industry by increasing the revenue and circulation (Jeffrey, 2000). This evolution of an expanded media market also has its share of pitfalls.

Manjappa (2014) in his research on the Indian media industry notes:

The Press Council of India has taken serious note of certain unhealthy practices of Indian press such as concentration of ownership, devaluation of editorial functions, hyper-commercialization, price wars, paid news, private treaties with corporate, bribe-taking and downgrading the professional ethics and social obligations. The champions of social responsibility of press have called upon the press to function responsibly in India under the changed circumstances.

According to the annual report published in March 2016 by the RNI (Registrar of Newspapers in India), there are 110,851 registered publications in India, including 16,136 daily newspapers. According to another report published in March 2016 by the Ministry of Information and Broadcast, India, there are 403 television news channels in India. Both the

reports indicate that the mainstream news media in India has been steadily growing at a time when there is a decline in the news media in the rest of the world (Kilman, 2015).

According to the Audit Bureau of Circulation in India, newspaper sales in the country have increased by 15% in 2014 (Bhargavi et al., 2015). However, advertising in print news media has declined due to an increase in broadcast media and Internet-based services (Manjappa, 2014). To attract younger readers, the Indian print media business heavily subsidizes digital journalism (Manjappa, 2014). As has been documented in other parts of the world, the newspaper industry is gradually dying with many titles going out of print and some laying off newsroom staff (Mitchell & Holcomb, 2016). According to the *State of the media report 2016*, published by the Pew Research Center, newsrooms are undergoing budget cuts and layoffs; in 2014, there was a decline of 10% in employment in print newsrooms and circulation reduced by 1.3% in North America (Kilman, 2015). However, circulation rose by 9.8% in Asia in 2014 from a year earlier, 1.2% in the Middle East and Africa and 0.6% in Latin America (Kilman, 2015). The newspaper business in India is still the strongest print newspaper industry in the world (Kilman, 2015; Bhargavi et a. 2015).

The Indian print news media holds tremendous clout in gatekeeping news and it has the ability to play a crucial role in the formation of public opinion and public policy. Compared to other media platforms, print news media is known to provide in-depth coverage of policy related issues (Manjappa, 2014; Ram, 2016). The continued growth and popularity of the print news industry and its proven ability to create a public and political agenda (Ram, 2016) supported my decision to focus on the Indian print news for this study. At the same time, it is important to note that the Indian news media is different from its western counterparts; in India news media are privately owned, operated and the owners are affiliated to political parties. The following section

will give an overview of how the evolution of the Indian media, and the print media in particular, has influenced the coverage of feminist activism.

Coverage of feminism in Indian news media

In the previous section, I discussed how in the 1970s violence against women (VAW) became the cornerstone of feminist activism in India, resulting in increased coverage of this issue in Indian newspapers (Neupane, 2014; D'Souza, 2009; Kazenstein, 1989). However, the liberalization of the Indian economy has negatively influenced the coverage of feminism in India. Since independence, the Indian media has led to both positive developments, such as the creation of employment opportunities and technological advancements, and negative developments, such as the corporatization of the profession leading to paid news, corruption and gender-biased framing of issues (Ray, 2009). Chaudhuri (2000) observes that, "Representations of feminism in the print media surveyed are therefore replete with terms like 'unnatural', 'excessive', 'irrational' and 'berserk'" (pp. 273). Chaudhuri's (2000) article about the relationship between feminism and the Indian print media shows how coverage of feminism is limited to the two popular trends of "feminism of choice" and "traditional feminism." While Kazenstein's (1989) in-depth analysis of coverage of feminist activism on violence against women in English newspapers from 1977-1988 identifies the trend of specifically reporting crimes of violence against women.

Between the 1970-80s, the shift in the feminist agenda corresponded with an increase in newspaper coverage of feminism. Kazenstein observed in her study that in the twenty days of sampling in 1977 and 1978, there were only three articles on women. The next year in 1979, when the feminist movement focused on issues of violence, the number of articles over a period of twenty days rose to twelve and stayed constant through the 1980s.

The inclusion of issues related to violence encouraged increased newspaper coverage not just on issues of rape, dowry murders, and other violence, but also around other movement concerns of class, caste, religion and politics. Kazenstein (1989) quantifies the coverage by noting that two-thirds of the article coverage was on violence. Finally, Kazenstein (1989) observes that:

Coverage of violence against women became highly influenced by the movement's construction of violence as a problem. What had earlier been reported as "police blotter" assault or suicide came to be "labeled" as involving a suspicion of dowry murder or forced suicide stemming from family quarrels. What might have been earlier described as sexual assault came to be denoted as rape, and special note was made of police involvement, using the term "custodial rape." The movement's role in "naming" violence seemed to have a clear impact on press reporting. There can be no doubt that movement-prompted newspaper attention has contributed to the widespread popular recognition of dowry harassment and violence. Newspapers convey consciousness far beyond the direct reach of feminist organizations themselves (pp. 68).

Conversely, according to Chaudhuri (2012), the Indian news media, specifically the print media, has been accused of distorting the core values of feminism in its coverage. Guided by its economic interest in satisfying the advertisers, print media has co-opted feminism as a revenue generation technique, moving away from the values of feminist activism (Chaudhuri, 2000). More recently, Pamela Phillipose, former editor of Women's Feature Service¹², in an interview with Neupane (2014) describes the role of Indian news media in the coverage of sex crimes on women. Phillipose explains that although there was an increase in rape coverage as well as decrease in victim blaming in the 1980s because of the Mathura rape case, this positive trend gradually declined in the 1990s. As she puts it, "Dictated by the market, and the advertising sector in particular, the mainstream media began to shift their focus to consumers during the

¹² WFS was founded in 1978 as an UNESCO initiative to provide more gender analysis in media. It became an independent organization in 1991 based in India. It works with journalists to focus and produce news stories on gendered issues. See <https://www.wfsnews.org/aboutus.html> for more details.

liberalization years. This meant that many important tropes fell off the media map, including that of gender” (Neupane, 2014).

The political and economic elites exercise a strong control over the media industry (Rodrigues & Ranganathan, 2015). Downey & Neyazi (2014) succinctly describe the Indian news media industry and its impact on coverage of issues:

Political elites still attempt to maintain control in direct and indirect partisan and indeed in networked media systems. New pragmatic entrepreneurs have emerged with decidedly dubious records and with twin goals of maximizing their economic and political power. At the same time, there is a trend toward journalism that works in the public interest rather than those of narrow regional and/or national elites (p 476)

Moreover, the framing of non-profit organizations, more commonly known as NGOs (Non-governmental organizations), in India has tended to be negative (D’Souza, 2009). Specifically, in the context of feminist NGOs and movements, scholars believe that the mainstream media has “demonized, personalized and trivialized feminists” (D’Souza, 2009; Chaudhuri, 2000). According to D’Souza (2009), NGOs manage to maintain legitimacy in the news discourse by being associated with socially accepted issues such as human and health rights and not being associated with more contentious issues that threaten the social order. The selection bias is clear in these newspapers; journalists tend to rely heavily on official government and NGO sources, while the voices of vulnerable victims ‘rescued’ by NGOs or the views of ‘lay’ non-institutionally-linked communities served by NGOs remain noticeably absent in the discourse. “The articles in *The Hindu* discussed NGOs with regards to a variety of social issues; in these articles, the NGO or the issue were the primary focus of the article. In *The Times of India* however, the primary focus of several articles was an event, a celebrity, or young Indian cosmopolites, while the NGO itself appeared as a peripheral reference” (D’Souza, 2009, p. 490?).

In the recent past however, the growing accessibility of social media platforms has made it possible for feminist activists and NGOs to bypass mass media gatekeeping and continue activism through other social media platforms (Parab, 2016). Indeed, Indian feminist activists have been effectively using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to disseminate information and build an activist network aimed at countering violence against women (Losh, 2014; Chattopadhyay, 2011). The following section will focus on feminist cyber activism and its impact on anti-rape feminist activism.

Feminist activism and social media: Reclaiming of public spaces

Chattopadhyay (2011) gives an early example of online feminist activism; the pink chaddi campaign (the pink underwear campaign). The pink chaddi movement as mentioned earlier, started from a local incident in the city of Bangalore, where a fringe political group demeaned women who went to pubs. Some women confronted this group by sending them pink underwear and named it the pink chaddi movement. The campaign soon gathered national and global support through online spaces. “To a certain extent, movements like these disseminate women’s collective experiences and encourage the realignment of the political domain for gendered social change” (Chattopadhyay, 2011). Chattopadhyay (2011) bolsters Khamis’ (2010) argument on women creating advocacy spaces through the Internet.

After the brutal gang rape of Jyoti Singh Pandey in Delhi in 2012, feminist activists, NGOs, and citizen groups used social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to protest against the heinous act (Dey, 2014). These online spaces provided feminist activists with tools for advocacy and awareness, which they used to promote awareness of sexual harassment and rape (Dey, 2014; Chattopadhyay, 2011). Social media networks became not just tools of

advocacy but also tools to disseminate information on protest movements (Losh, 2014; Dey, 2014).

The rise of the Internet and social media sites has given a new direction to feminist activism in India, where women share their experiences of street and sexual harassment (Eagle, 2015; Dey, 2014). According to Eagle (2015), “Hashtag activism is part of the important work of awareness-raising, contributing to a larger conversation about eve teasing—a practice that, with silence, is allowed to continue unquestioned and under the guise of simply being a part of the culture” (p. 350). Similarly, Dey (2014) highlights the manner, in which feminists are using social media to circumvent gatekeeping by the mass media. She argues that online spaces have:

helped organizations and individuals to be less dependent on the established mass media in conveying their messages to a broader audience base. The action and reaction followed each other in very short cycles, and the speed of diffusion of new ideas, tactics and arguments considerably increased. The Internet and social media have also been used to generate useful debates and meaningful conversations related to gender. (p. 200)

Nevertheless, the spurt in online feminist activism in India is not without challenges from trolling, harassment of activists, cyber-vigilantism, and loss of focus on the core issue of feminist struggles. For instance, the 2012 Delhi gang rape protests were overwhelmed by demands of violent punishment such as chemical castration, the death penalty, and stoning for the perpetrators and others implicated in rape (Roy, 2015; Losh, 2014; Dutta & Sircar, 2013). In the process, the voice of the Indian feminists who oppose the death penalty were lost in this digital conundrum (Dutta & Sircar, 2013). Losh (2014), chronicles that the online narrative after Jyoti Singh Pandey’s rape and murder included hashtags such as #inhumanebastards, #death4rape, and others, which indicated anger and eagerness for revenge (Losh, 2014). According to Dutta & Sircar (2013):

Feminist voices have been a part of these protests, but the chorus of slogans made it difficult to decipher who was saying what. There were loud calls to end state apathy on violence against women, make public transportation safe, make the police more vigilant,

speed up judicial prosecutions, amend rape laws, and stop victim blaming. But demands for the death penalty, chemical castration, and death by stoning of rapists were louder... In the face of the grave loss, anger, and trauma that gave rise to demands for revenge, how would feminist “rational” political reasoning stand its ground? How were we to converse with the parents who demanded the death penalty for the rapists who had brutally tortured, raped, and murdered their twenty-three-year-old daughter? (p. 295)

Apart from cybervigilantism, there was also the issue of confusion of activism with popular Bollywood movies. For instance, during the protest movement of the 2012 Delhi gang rape, hashtags such as #braveheart, #Jagruti or “awareness” were also trending with #Nirbhaya but these hashtags were names of Bollywood movies shared by movie fans, creating confusion within the movement (Losh, 2014). Losh (2014) also points out how the online feminist activists failed the hashtag test in India, “Hashtags must be simultaneously short, unique, memorable, unambiguous in meaning, resistant to variant spellings, and descriptive as content labels. Yet all of the hashtags regularly used by Breakthrough and Blank Noise¹³ invariably fail at least one of these tests.” #Nirbhaya after the gang rape of Jyoti Singh Pandey became the trending hashtag in Twitter during December 2012-January 2013 (Guha, 2015a; Chopra, 2014). In a country, where social media platforms are limited to only 12% of the population (Velayanikal, 2016), a digital divide¹⁴ and lack of digital literacy¹⁵ constitute significant issues. In this situation, developing a bridge between mainstream media and social media activism is important.

The historical background of the feminist movement, the Indian press and the influence of the Indian media provide a foundation to this study, and also inform the readers of the

¹³ Breakthrough and Blank Noise are feminist activist groups working against rape, sexual harassment and violence against women.

¹⁴ The idea of the "digital divide" refers to the growing gap between the underprivileged members of society, especially the poor, rural, elderly, and handicapped portion of the population who do not have access to computers or the internet; and the wealthy, middle-class, and young Americans living in urban and suburban areas who do have access. (<http://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/cs201/projects/digital-divide/start.html>)

¹⁵ Digital literacy is the ability to find, evaluate, utilize, share, and create content using information technologies and the Internet. (Cornell University Digital Literacy Resource)

political, social and economic nuances in India. Indian press historically has been involved in advocacy, it has been an essential tool for advocacy of social, economic and political issues, and this stems from anti-colonial advocacy role in pre-independent India. I had assumed that the role of the Indian mass media in political, social and economic advocacy would also reflect in collaboration in the Indian feminist activism, but this study did not indicate that.

In the next chapter, I discuss the theoretical framework of this study and provide an emerging theoretical concept to develop a bridge between mainstream media and social media activism.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

The role of mass media and social media in supporting the efforts of Indian feminist activists to combat violence against women has been intensely debated (Phillips et. al, 2015; Patel, 2014; Dutta & Sircar, 2013). Some journalism practitioners and scholars have hailed the ability of the Indian press to build a public and political agenda on social and political issues (Ram, 2016; Rodriguez & Raghunathan, 2015; Patel, 2014). However, other scholars have contested the ability of news media to set an agenda when it comes to any feminist activism (Patel, 2014; Kazenstein, 1989). As Patel (2014) argues that the role of Indian mass media in reporting anti-rape activism is “double-edged”, balancing between sensational articles underestimating the issue of sexual violence and those providing sensitive portrayals of rape victims (pp. 11). However, there is negligible literature on the role of various media platforms in anti-rape feminist activism in digitally emerging countries.

The Indian mass media has been an important tool for advocacy of social, economic and political issues, such as anti-corruption, anti-child trafficking and others (Ram, 2016; Patel, 2014). It has however also been accused of being a gatekeeper rather than an advocacy tool for feminist activism (Kazenstein, 1989). Meanwhile, social media platforms have been an alternate space for feminist activism in India in the recent past (Losh, 2014). Thus, the intersection of agenda building, digital feminism and mass media rape frames will be an important framework for my study. In this chapter, I will discuss the relevant theories of *agenda building*, *digital feminist activism*, *rape coverage in news media* and *the hybridization of media systems*. I will also explain the connections between these and how they underpin my study.

I will start with the theory of agenda setting and then move on to the agenda building theory. Although agenda building is the precursor to agenda setting, it is not possible to explain

the process of agenda building without explaining the seminal theory of agenda setting. I will then explain the evolution and relevance of digital feminist activism in my study. Finally, I will focus on the concept of hybridization of the media systems and information.

Public and political agenda building

Within the communication literature, the theory of agenda setting has been the focus of significantly more scholarly work, both theoretically and empirically, than agenda building. Scheufele (2009), in his research on agenda setting, describes the process of agenda building as a precursor to the process of agenda setting. This process of forming a media agenda has been explained as a first step (Cobb and Elder, 1971; Scheufele, 2000), which is sometimes, although not always, called “agenda building.” “[I]n the process of agenda-building, the media agenda is considered the dependent variable” (Scheufele, 2000, 302).



Figure 1: Scheufele's overview of agenda-setting research

The second level of analysis is the process of forming a public agenda, when the media is the independent variable and the public's agenda is the dependent variable, is known as

“agenda setting” (Scheufele, 2009; McCombs, 2014). The second level agenda-setting expands the original concept of agenda-setting to ‘how’ the audience thinks about an issue, event or any personality (Scheufele, 2009).

Scholars explain agenda building as a process involving the media and the public to attract the attention of policymakers or elites (Nisbet, 2008; Cobb and Elder (1971); Denham, 2010; Miller, 2010). Nisbet (2008) provides the most succinct definition of the process: “Agenda building refers to the process by which news organizations and journalists feature, emphasize, and/or select certain events, issues, or sources to cover over others.”

According to Scheufele (2000), the agenda building process is the initial stage of media or public agenda, while Sheafer and Weimann (2005) suggest that agenda building is media platforms responding to the interests of their audiences. The progression of an issue from public to media discussion and finally to policy making marks the building of an agenda (Miller, 2010). More recently, the rise of new media platforms has added new systematic forms of communication, such as emails and social media posts, and influenced the process of agenda building (Denham, 2010)

Cobb and Elder (1972) define agenda building as the process of issue creation for decision makers. Meanwhile, Miller (2010) describes agenda building as the process of shaping media and public agendas through information subsidies – press releases or other low-cost information pieces that can be used in the absence of individuals advocating for the cause (Gandy, 1982). In the information age, social media networks could well represent information subsidies. Social media networks are free to use and are often a low-cost way to create a campaign. Thus, in the absence of individual advocates, campaigns can now be conducted virtually.

Evident from the diverse analogy of the agenda-building process, various scholars have defined the process of agenda building differently and contradictorily: while some scholars interpret it as a process between the media and public; others see subsidiaries, policymakers, the media and the public having a shared role.

According to Cassidy (2008), extra-media influences on the agenda building process could include pressure groups, sources, audiences, other media organizations and advertisers. Robinson and Bell (2013) emphasize the significance of such extra media influences on agenda building: “Studies of media agenda building have provided evidence that extra-media influences are the most effective leverage point for individuals attempting to attract and hold media attention” (pp. 357). In many cases, agenda building also occurs when high-profile people demonstrate their concern for the issue (Denham, 2010). Social media platforms can function as a type of extra-media influence. Social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook work differently and hence their agenda building and agenda setting capacities are also starkly distinct. Twitter is known as the “awareness system” as it has the ability to quickly share build an agenda on any issue by sharing information (Jensen et al, 2016). On the other hand, Facebook’s agenda building capability lies in engaging the users by adding their interpretation to the content shared by the individuals in their network to build agenda (Guo & McCombs, 2015).

However, there has been limited attention given to the feminist issues of sexual harassment, rape, sexism, and gender equality by scholars of agenda setting and agenda building theory (Protess et al., 1985). This study indicates that in issues of rape and sexual assault, media agenda setting has had limited effect on the public. Information subsidies are not limited to media agenda building, but in the context of this dissertation may be extended to public agenda

building, where social media platforms can be substituted for information subsidies in increasing awareness around violence against women. For instance, in the case of SlutWalk:

Digital social media and mass media have created cross-national flows of information regarding SlutWalk activities. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter appear to be the main organizing tools for the hundreds of local protests that were organized on every continent. Most events have a Facebook page with mobilization plans, photos, and video clips, as well as statements of purpose, slogans, and mission statements (Carr, 2013, pp. 26).

Agenda building theory also analyzes the mechanism through which advocacy groups attract the attention of the media and policy makers (Denham, 2010). Activists and advocacy groups depend on a variety of media platforms, including legacy media, to build both public and policy agendas. Robinson and Bell (2013) discuss the idiosyncratic relationship between activists and the media in their article on agenda building and advocacy. Interest groups or activists along with the public play an important role in the agenda building process and therein lies its difference with the agenda setting process. According to Rogers and Dearing (1996), the difference between agenda setting and agenda building is the dominant role of media or the information subsidiaries; media is dominant in agenda setting and information subsidiaries in agenda setting. Agenda building theory explores the motives behind the media's agenda (Nisbet, 2008).

Berkowitz (1994) undertakes a nuanced analysis of agenda setting and agenda building theories by explaining policy agenda setting and policy agenda building. He argues that the agenda relationship between the media and policymakers is the focus of agenda setting. On the other hand, the agenda relationship between the public and the media creates the agenda building process. For instance, when media scholars focus on how the media influences policymakers on policy issues and vice versa, it is part of agenda setting scholarship. When media scholars focus

on the media influencing the public opinion on a particular issue or the public compelling the media on an issue or event, it becomes a part of agenda building scholarship.

Therefore, in the agenda setting process, the media is at the center of the theory. In contrast, in the agenda building process, information subsidies such as press conferences, press releases and others have a stronger role. Lee (2016) provides a comprehensive difference between agenda building and agenda setting:

Agenda-setting theory emphasizes the power of the media in setting the public and the policy agenda, whereas agenda-building theory posits a reciprocity between the media and other sources or society in general in building the public and the policy agenda.

Miller (2010) criticizes this hegemonic relationship between the media and the public in agenda setting scholarship, arguing that “research in agenda building extends beyond the media–public relationship into investigations into how media and public agendas are constructed.”

Lang and Lang (1981) define the agenda building process as “a continuous one, involving a number of feedback loops... among political figures, the press, and the public” (pp. 466). This reciprocity model between the media, public and policymakers, developed by Lang and Lang (1981), could be an ideal precursor to the interdependent agenda building process. However, much has changed since 1981. With the introduction of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, the agenda building process now involves a bigger and more engaged public in this conversation. Therefore, along with policymakers, press, and public, we can now include social media networks, networked publics and activists.

When active community groups form alliances based on mutual interests and values, they form advocacy coalitions in an effort to push their agenda through mainstream mass media platforms (Birkland, 1998; Boydston, 2013). However, this dependence on mainstream mass media platforms is gradually decreasing due to social media networks. The access and use of

social media networks is not unconscious, rather it is a concerted and conscious effort aimed at agenda building and advocacy. McGovern (2009) also identify the strength of social media networks in the process of building the public agenda. They argue that journalists interact with social media users to get new information and engage with the public. However, scholars (Bekker et al., 2011; Meraz, 2009) have overlooked the need to assess the intermedia effects of mass media and micro media on political and social mobilization. Denham (2010) identified the concept of intermedia agenda building for situations where one news platform affects the content of another platform, thereby influencing public opinion and public policy.

The process of agenda building will be helpful in evaluating the effects of news media and micro media on political and social mobilization in digitally emerging countries. The current research on the relationship between micro media and mass media around issues of political and social mobilization largely caters to first world, digitally savvy countries such as the concept of Hybrid media system by Andrew Chadwick. But in digitally emerging countries, the relationship between micro media and mass media is complicated due to the digital divide.

In the recent past, studies on agenda building on violence against women have narrowly examined public protest and social media movement. Critics argue that although social media platforms initiate discussions on feminism and violence against women, whether they lead to political actions or transformations is debatable (Munro, 2013; Schultz et. al, 2011). Schuster (2013), in her work on the political participation of young women on feminist issues, suggests that while online platforms are less intimidating for young women and feminist activists, they have less impact on the “real political world”. Schuster (2013), Munro (2013), and Schultz et al. (2011) critique the exclusive use of online platforms for feminist digital activism, however they provide only limited examination and analysis of the methods used by feminist activists to build

public and political agendas on feminist issues. Critical scholarship on building a public and policy agenda on sexual violence against women in a digitally emerging country such as India could develop if we focus on the relationship between past agenda building models and social media activism.

My scholarship is deeply embedded in the epistemology of feminist digital activism to combat sexual harassment and rape. Feminist digital activism has a better chance to build a public and political agenda against sexual harassment and rape, when it influences both social media and mass media to build an agenda. It is imperative to explain digital activism and the impact of digital platforms on feminist activism. To start with, we need to understand the relationship between activism, mobilization, and the various digital platforms. Activism is more than an action in favor of social or political change; it is in support of, or opposition to, one side of the controversial argument (Scholz, 2008). There is a thin line of difference between protest movement and cyber-activism. In the present context, activism activities extend beyond street protests, direct action, and other activities, it now includes a toolbox of various internet-based platforms, which may be used productively to engage and take activism to the next level (Harlow & Harp, 2012). The network culture, web 2.0 and participatory or convergence culture have emerged as a viable platform for activism (Castells, 2012).

Feminist digital activism

Digital activism refers to the use of digital technology in an activist campaign, in which political, social and economic factors also impact the use of digital infrastructure in activist campaigns (Devillart & Waniewsk, 2010). The interactions between such local movements and globalized virtual environments form a kind of hybrid “space of autonomy” (Castells, 2012, pp. 222). Although the sustained significance of such developments is still very much a matter of

debate, the cultural variations of digital networking provide some interesting frames of reference for contemporary activist politics and movements. The potential of the Internet to operate as a kind of “free public space” and create diverse networking practices enables new forms of social movement (Castells, 2012). Thereby digital space and tools have their own impact on the ways in which activism develops. Digital activism is also identified as cyberactivism. Illia (2003) defines the process of cyberactivism as follows:

Cyberactivism follows a process similar to activism, but is the result of new dynamics that definitively change the pressure on corporations. The redefinition of the concept of activism, considering public relations, issue management, politics, philosophy and sociology— systemic theory — shows that activism grows around issues selected by a group of individuals. (pp.326)

Past research shows that the Internet facilitates and transforms activism by promoting mobilization and collective identity (Castells, 2012; Harlow & Guo, 2013). The Internet also becomes a platform to disseminate information to a large number of people inexpensively in a short period (Castells, 2012; Tai, 2015; Durham, 2015). This is related to offline activism and political actions, where individuals have the capacity to congregate and participate in social movements (Harlow & Guo, 2013). Although this indicates a heavy dependence on technology (Deuze, 2006), digital activism has undergone considerable change from the web-based blogs and portals to social network based activism. Deuze’s (2006) findings on participation and engagement are focused on the time before the introduction of social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter as public platforms. Deuze discusses how the indymedia (blogs), online journalism and other blogs mobilized engagement and participation. Pavlik (2000) similarly bolsters the argument in the following:

Technological change is fundamentally reshaping the relationships between and among news organizations, journalists and their many publics, including audiences and other competitors. Digital culture and participation are intertwined. Participation also has a political dimension, as it ties in with a shift in the identity of citizens in Western elective

democracies from a rather passive 'informational' citizenry to a rights-based, monitorial and voluntarist citizenry (pp.234)

With the advent of social media, digital activism has undergone even more transformation. Milan (2013) posits that the diffusion of commercial web-like social networking sites are modifying the execution and operations of activism due to the changing relationship between the media, participation and mobilization. This increasingly participatory culture arises from the widespread proliferation of networked computers and Internet connections in the home, and increasingly in handheld mobile devices. Through this proliferation of handheld devices and social media networks, multiple platforms of expression and resistance have emerged. On a similar note, Harlow and Guo (2014) suggest that online social media platforms have become a common platform for digital activism, even though these electronic tools were created with the aim of creating social networks. As they put it:

2011 kicked off with social media-inspired protests throughout the Arab world, resulting in what the news media began to refer to as 'Facebook revolutions'. And 2011 closed with the digitally driven Occupy Movement that spread from Wall Street across the U.S. (pp.463).

In recent years, some media and communication scholars have focused their research on national and international protests and their use of the various social media platforms. Globally, it is recognized that diverse forms of digital activism also bring about social and political change by creating networks of informal interactions among diverse participants (Tai, 2015; Devillart & Waniewsk, 2010). Tai (2015) illustrates this with the following example:

Networked activism is the most visible manifestation in the recent Arab Spring movement that rocked the Middle East. In the case of China, it is no coincidence that online activism constitutes an essential telltale sign of the current evolving social order in a country marked by saturated popular contention. The latest surge in social media use in China has accelerated this overall pattern, and has injected new dynamics into the milieu of mass contestation and collective action both on- and offline. (pp. 121)

Hill (2013) further illustrates the relationship between social media networks and protests. To demonstrate this relationship Hill theorizes that the use of social media allows activists and protestors to turn into “a national and then international movement with no real central coordinated leadership.” For instance, “in 2010 and 2011, branches of UK Uncut¹⁶, US Uncut and other Uncut networks sprang into being whenever anyone used the hashtag, announced an action on Twitter and turned up, with others, to protest” (Hill, 2013). This is known as “networked horizontalism” (Hill, 2013). Social media networks are a boon for non-hierarchical movements, they have the capacity to bring together individuals and groups without any one having authority over others (Tai, 2015; Harlow & Guo, 2014). However, it might be naïve to assume that there is no existence of a power structure in social media networks (Castells, 2012; Kahn & Kellner, 2012).

Harlow and Guo (2014) note that despite millions of people using social networking sites globally, online activism is in its nascent stages and much remains unknown about how the Internet impacts mobilization. The authors explain that:

It is important to explore the usefulness and potential of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) for activism (Cleaver, 1998; Diani, 1999). Employing this paradigm, journalists focus on numbers, spectacles, or dramatic actions, rather than the message underlying the action (Watkins, 2001). To counter mainstream media’s misinformation, activists often turn to alternative media (Downing, 2001). (Harlow & Guo, 2014, pp.465)

This alternative media campaign by activists transcending international borders bolsters the movement and eventually helps in building public agenda (Scharff et al., 2016).

I argue that transnational feminism also makes a contribution to digital activism. The transnational feminist movement intersects with the digital interface of feminist movements,

¹⁶ “UK Uncut is a grassroots movement taking action to highlight alternatives to the government’s spending cuts.” Source: <http://www.ukuncut.org.uk>

where transnational activists use online platforms to mobilize feminist campaign (Scharff et al. 2016; Losh, 2014). The SlutWalk and Hollaback movement are both transnational feminist digital movements, which were created across national boundaries with the help of digital platforms. The growing scholarship in this area is inclined towards transnational theory of feminism and intersectionality. Third wave feminism, which started in the 1990s is more inclusive of women of color and individuals of other sexuality. Third wave feminism has been a significant resource for transnational women and their activism, although some research has been critical of the third wave, accusing it of contextualizing issues from Western perspectives (Yu, 2009). I argue that third wave feminism provides a platform and context to transnational feminism and intersectionality. For instance, violence against women is a fundamental issue in the third wave feminism movement. Violence against women can be best understood when it is explained using the transnational feminist paradigm and the intersectional identity lens. Similarly, transnational feminist theorization is becoming manifest in the coverage of rape and sexual assault internationally (Durham, 2015).

Intersectionality is a concept which challenges that idea of women as a homogenous group. Kimberly Crenshaw (1991) developed this concept based on her observation that experiences of black women are different from that of white women. Class and race along with gender made a difference. *Intersectionality* is a way to understand the shifting, fluid, complex natures of all of our inherited and social identities. One's race, class, gender and nationality give us insight into the complexity of intersections. In this context, Crenshaw's (1991) study on violence against women of color is groundbreaking. The intersections of race, gender and class that Crenshaw examined are neither fixed nor representative of identity as a totality. When #Blacklivesmatter became a dominant source of activism on the Internet, the activism only

focused on the male victims of police brutality. An alternate feminist hashtag #Sayhername was publicized by black feminist activists. This was in response to the absence of coverage and discussion of women of color, who were similar victims of police brutality.

The Internet and media represent contested terrains in which alternate subcultural forces are created as a response to conservative and hegemonic forces (Kahn & Kellner, 2012). Digital spaces are not just spaces for identity formation, they are platforms to express intersectional ideology, culture hegemony and politics (Leors & Ponzanesi, 2014). The Internet provides a space for marginalized groups to voice their opinion and construct their activism, but the medium has its own pitfalls. “Groups and individuals excluded from mainstream politics and cultural production of internet technopolitics and culture” (Kahn & Kellner, 2012, pp. 600), but also add a note of caution that it would be naïve to assume that the Internet is just a democratic and participatory platform; it also has a robust commercial and economic function. Mejias (2013) also identifies the issues of gatekeeping due to the commercialization and commodification of social media networks.

The relationship between feminism and digital activism in India has been complex. The Delhi gang rape protests saw the combination of online and street protests: They brought thousands of protestors on the streets and the online conversation on the issue was diverse, ranging from discussions on rape punishments to safe public spaces for women to even celebrity endorsement of the issue (Rao, 2013; Losh, 2014). Indian feminist activists, within the country and outside, adopted several approaches to mobilize and energize participants through social media platforms, particularly Twitter (Losh, 2014). In the recent past, social and political movements in India have gathered strength from the various social media platforms (Khamis, 2010; Losh, 2014; Scharff et al., 2016).

Cyberfeminism is described as a movement using technology to note and combat inequality in digital, physical and ideological spaces (Schulte, 2011). Cyberfeminism has facilitated collaboration on activism between women from diverse spaces. Although feminist digital activism has usually been assumed to be a radical political movement of white Western women (Khamis, 2010; Yu, 2009), recent cyber movements in India suggest that collaboration between feminist movements could culminate in feminist cyber-activism in digitally emerging countries such as India. Examples of feminist transnational collaborations include the SlutWalk, Stop Street Harassment, and Hollaback movements, which have become prominent movements in metropolitan cities in India. On the whole, feminism is embracing newer paradigms to accommodate activism and theorizing. “The feminist project is becoming increasingly inclusive of many kinds of differences, including among women and across feminist theorizing” (Steiner, 2013, pp 116).

Cyberfeminism also promotes intersectionality and diversity in the feminist movement. Khamis (2010) attributes the rise of Islamic feminism to discourses in cyberfeminism. While Islamic feminism might seem a contradictory proposition, owing to the dichotomy between religious restrictions and the struggle for gender equality (Khamis, 2010), digital spaces have enabled Muslim women to protest and share knowledge against male hegemony within the framework of Islamic norms and values. Scholars operating within the cyberfeminist tradition thus challenge the hegemonic discourse in Western media, which tends to stereotype women from the Global South as uniformly victimized by patriarchal norms and instead focus on the role of existing intersections of class and religion (and in the case of India, caste), in mediating women’s experiences with sexual violence.

Scholarly research has indicated that feminist digital activism builds the public and political agenda on sexual harassment and rape, when there is combined information seeking and distribution by feminist activists. Eventually, the audience becomes engaged with the issue, particularly through social media and even digital witnesses, challenging the hegemonic boundaries of the traditional media, forcing policymakers to take action. India is a country of diversity and Indians have multiple identities of caste, class, gender, region and religion. Often these social identities intersect and create intersectional identities of victims of sexual violence. Intersectionality and women's media activism have been interwoven to emphasize the meaningful participation of women in the media and transform the myths associated with coverage on women and sexual violence against women (Worthington, 2008). I will use this idea of intersectionality to discuss rape myths in media coverage and demonstrate that rape myth frames are most meaningfully operationalized in the context of intersectionality (Bonnes, 2013).

Framing of rape in news media

The politics of the newsroom is an important indication of how rape coverage is constructed in the news. Joseph (2008) indicates that the ethical values followed in Indian newsrooms and the commodification of news ("what sells as news") influence the news discourses on rape. The concept of newsworthiness is employed by journalism scholars to understand the framing of news on rape. Based on a similar premise, Hollander and Rodegers (2014) state that the "news value of conflict, which helped establish the stories as 'worthy,' was tied to the disparity between the violent attacks on the women and the perpetrator."

According to Durham (2013), institutional and social media structures of power marginalize women within the media, including the different ways they are framed. The misogynist biases in the content of news coverage of violence against women are not deliberate,

but they are a result of a hegemonic ideology perpetuated by elite white men (Gallagher, 2007). These patterns reflect the “common sense” of a society in which women’s standpoints are subordinated and news values reflect a dominant ideology invested in the interests of men. Durham (2013, 2015) and Joseph (2008) posit that journalists are unaware of these pre-existing biases, as they operate within a broader social and political context that shapes the reporting on violence against women. Reinforcing this claim, Gallagher (2007) writes that “media content still reflects a masculine vision of the world and what is important” (pp. 7). In analyzing content on issues of violence against women, the consideration of societal biases and newsroom politics becomes an important external factor. This is particularly relevant in my study, since gender, religious, class and caste biases influence the selection and framing of rape coverage in Indian newsrooms (Joseph, 2014; Joseph, 2008).

News narratives related to rape and sexual assault tilt towards the whore-virgin dichotomy, constructing victimization and deviancy in media frames and victim blaming. Frames on rape myths include “women want to be raped,” “women deserve to be raped,” “women provoke rape,” “women need to be raped” and “women enjoy being raped” (Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-Macdonald, 2002, pp. 3). Evidence from multiple scholarly articles show that these rape myths are universal, as similar frame narratives operate globally. In large part, these frames are created due to the fact that news coverage is based on the dominant perception of race and gender; apart from other factors such as pornography and sexualization in media. Rape myth frames become relevant in the context of race and gender, since news frames constructed on rape myths reinforce misconceptions on race and gender. Rape of women of color is underreported and ignored by the media. Ignorance, stigma and myths around rape and sexual assault increase due to this underreporting (DeCapua, 2013). Minority women are devalued through the relative

invisibility or minimization of their experiences of rape victimization (Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-Macdonald, 2002).

This deficit in the reporting of incidents of sexual violence is prevalent in most parts of the world (Hollander & Rodgers, 2014; Bones, 2013; Hegde, 2011; Alat, 2006). Hollander and Rodger (2014) chronicle the *good victim* and the *bad victim* in US media coverage of rape and sexual assault incidents. Bones (2013) provides a similar depiction of South African media coverage, Hegde (2011) and Rao (2013) do the same in the context of Indian media coverage as does Alat (2006) in the context of Turkish media.

The most prevalent form of reporting news of rape involves the “whore” and “victim” dichotomy (Hollander & Rodgers, 2014). The assaulted woman is a powerless object who has been “violated”. The media either sympathizes with the virgin victim or chastises the whore, who asked for it (Cole & Daniel, 2005; Durham, 2015; Hollander & Rodgers, 2013). To amend this situation, Worthington (2008) proposes that rape news coverage should focus on the victim’s perspective, in order to minimize the opportunities for audiences to engage in victim blaming and suspect mitigation. Other rape myths, including victim blaming, lack of adherence to feminine norms, and rape as retaliation, develop when sexual assault does not conform to the norms of the existing framework of gender roles (Alat, 2006; Franiuk et al., 2008). This victim blaming position draws its argument from the pillars of patriarchy. By emphasizing the so-called immorality of the victims, their lack of adherence to gender norms, their careless or provocative behavior, and even by accusing them of inventing the crime, press reports appear oriented towards forgiving the perpetrators. Alat (2006), in her study of Turkish media coverage of victims of rape and sexual assault, focuses on the sympathetic language towards the perpetrator:

The responsibility of the attacker is reduced by making him invisible. Using passive clauses, the attacker appears unknown or as a stranger, even though later in the text it is reported that he is an ex-boyfriend or ex-husband. This way of reporting – hiding the attacker’s identity – undermines the seriousness of male violence in the society and maintains the myth that family is a sacred and safe place for women, although the reality might be the opposite (pp. 302).

The hypocritical rape myths in the news coverage, where the popular narrative is that men are the victims of their passion and obsession for women, and women lack moral and social character, indicates the existence of patriarchy in newsrooms (Worthington, 2008; O’Hara, 2012). O’Hara (2012) further focuses on various rape myths in the media, such as the sexualization of victims by focusing on their dress, make-up and body. Myths surrounding the perpetrator include being sex starved or insane. Past and present research indicates there are damaging outcomes to rape myths (O’Hara, 2012; Ardovini-Brooker and Caringella-Macdonald, 2002), through stigmatizing women who have been raped or sexually assaulted.

News media coverage of rape and sexual harassment in India

In recent years, after the 2012 Delhi gang rape of Jyoti Singh Pandey, communications and legal scholars have focused on the rape coverage of Indian news media. The focus of the media framing in the 2012 Delhi gang rape case was primarily on the protests and the incident (Phillips et al. 2015; Jolly 2016). Jolly (2016) in her study found that there was little to no negligible victim blaming of Pandey in the media coverage. Phillips et. al (2015) in their study assert that there were some instances of victim blaming by controversial spiritual and political leaders that were reported by the media. These comments criticized the woman for being guilty of being present in a public space at night and wearing a Western-style dress. (Phillips et. al, 2015).

Nagar (2016) analyzed the news media coverage of Jyoti Singh Pandey's gang rape in the two most circulated English and Hindi newspapers in India, namely *The Times of India* and *Dainik Jagran*, and found that there was a steady increase in the coverage of the incident as the protests also peaked. She argues that there was a consistent focus on the middle-class background of the victim, leading to her deification. Jolly (2016) and Nagar (2016), have agreed that the increased and consistent coverage of Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder was an outlier in the Indian media. Unfortunately, there has been no decrease in the incidence of rape and sexual assault and neither have the media or scholars taken the issue forward with respect to other rape or sexual assault cases. The clock seems to have stopped in 2012 for discussions regarding the framing and news coverage of rape and sexual assault victims. Most scholarly work on rape and sexual harassment coverage in India focuses on Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape in 2012. There needs to be more study of media coverage of rape and sexual assault after 2012 and an assessment if rape coverage has undergone any changes after 2012. An analysis media coverage post-2012 would indicate if all rape and sexual assault is covered consistently.

Anti-rape activism and the role of the media

The news media in many countries, including India, are legally bound to withhold the name of the assaulted women to protect her honor. This not only stigmatizes rape, but also objectifies the body of the woman. "The stigma associated with rape remains grave for rape victims and all too often impedes victims coming forward. Therefore, the cases that do come forward in the legal system tend to be the same sort of cases that the media deem... newsworthy. And these are most frequently the more unusual and the more sensational types of rape cases" (Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-Macdonald, 2002, pp. 4). This is true globally. Rape and sexual assault are not uncommon in India; the NCRB (National Crime Research Bureau) reported that only 29% of

rape accused were convicted: publicized instances include the Park Street gang rape case of 2012; the Delhi Gang rape of 2012; the rape of a Mumbai journalist in 2013; the Kamduni gang rape case of 2014; the rape of an Uber passenger in November 2014 and many others. But it is the Delhi gang rape case of 2012, which became sensational and received prolonged national and international coverage. The brutality associated with the case made it unusual, leading to mass protests and eventually a change in the existing law. In 2005, another rape case of a call center executive was widely covered by the news media in India. Hegde (2011) discusses the relationship between media coverage and the incidence of sexual assault in India. She writes that the coverage was male centric, which is unsurprising as men control the majority of newsrooms, but does not discuss what the media failed to address in this coverage. Media frames and the coverage of sexual assault address patriarchal concerns, such as the perils of a woman working outside the confines of home, issues of safety in urban spaces, and keeping the “honor” of the women and their families. I speculate that the print media refrained from addressing the concerns and expectations of women as individuals, rather than as part of a patriarchal family structure.

The discussion of rape myths and societal perceptions is tied together. Worthington (2008) explains that “some viewers mobilize progressive elements in the text to reassert assault survivors’ perspectives and some draw on resources beyond the text to discuss the rape scandal in patriarchal terms that presume women’s responsibility for preventing assault.” To maintain objectivity and balance, the press provides an equal prominence and coverage to the perpetrators’ voices; eventually relegating the victims’ stories to lesser importance (Meyers, 2004). Ironically rape gets more media attention compared to other women’s issues, although the majority of the time this attention is superficial and the media focus is on the events rather than the process or the subtext that leads to the incidents of rape and sexual assault (Hegde, 2011).

Women journalists of the Global South have frequently accused Western women journalists of generalizing issues of rape and sexual assault. Ms. Magazine has tried to resolve this issue by hiring feminist reporters from within specific non-Western countries. One can see here the limitations of simply increasing the number of female journalists in the newsroom without fundamentally challenging the way news works and the inherent cultural bias:

News is typically produced by a western news organization, from a western perspective, and for global consumption. Reporters and sources are western, and women are “othered” through the “neo-traditional” story stance. This lack of context is especially evident in Western coverage of crimes of women in the Global South. While mere attention to women’s issues in the news media might be seen as a step forward, the debate about a potentially global, homogenizing feminism shows that certain well-intended representations might be problematic. One of the main concerns is that women in “other” cultures are represented as victims without an understanding of their varied local contexts. (Geertsema, 2009)

Violence against women can be best understood when it is explained using the intersectional identity lens. Khatidja and Gangoli (2011) in their study combine rape and sexual assault with the intersectional identity of the woman. What is her position in society? Is she higher educated? Is she from the city or a rural area? What is her economic position? Is “her story” valuable for the media and policy makers? The “status” of the woman within the family and outside the family is significant in the context of the focus that it receives from the media, law-enforcement, public and policy makers.

Hybridization of media systems

With the evolution in digital media and the dialogue on issues of rape and sexual harassment on social media platforms, feminist digital activism has found a virtual space to create public agenda on these issues. Again, the intersectional identities of the feminist activists play a significant role in their engagement with media. Class, caste, location, and digital literacy and access are determining factors for feminist activists to build their agenda in the Indian

context. Journalists and activists have repeatedly identified that rape coverage in Indian mass media is inconsistent. The participants of this dissertation have also affirmed this claim that similar rapes don't get similar coverage, therefore it's important to identify and understand the gap in media coverage. The following section will provide an understanding of the hybrid media system and its relationship with advocacy groups.

The hybrid media system theory proposed by Andrew Chadwick (2013) has three major components – *news and journalism*, *election campaigning*, and *engagement and mobilization*. I will be drawing closely from the third component of engagement and mobilization. The hybrid media system approach encompasses the various advocacy movements, such as 38 Degrees, Avaaz, and MoveOn, and the shifts between older and newer media to mobilize existing supporters and influence policy (Chadwick, 2013). The leaders of these new movements participate in the digital monitoring and engagement of the views of their members through digital tools, and then use the information to create digital campaigns at the time the issue receives prominence in the mainstream media (Chadwick & Smith, 2016). Chadwick (2013) encourages political campaigns to combine the new and old media logic for an effective outcome. Chadwick (2013) recognizes the limitations of online actors in transcending the barriers of the mainstream media gatekeeping. But Chadwick and Smith (2016) accept that online actors are capable of influencing traditional gatekeepers. However, this is a possibility in first world, digitally developed countries. In digitally emerging countries, online actors may or may not be able to influence the digital gatekeepers; depending on other factors such the social identity of the people involved, the importance of the issue to the public and access to digital resources of the actors involved.

Recent studies on hybrid communication systems, specifically in the context of the 2016 US presidential election, have argued that the candidates who gain influence on social media are those who are able to create an interaction between traditional media channels and social media (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016; Ragas et. al, 2016). This synergy has boosted the popularity of the candidates and kept them in the news cycle.

However, Chadwick (2013) argues that grassroots activism is fueled by new media logic, since their access to the Internet and various digital platforms enables activists to penetrate the elite hold of the media. But this media system is essentially based on First World countries, which have relatively high Internet penetration and low digital divides, as cited in chapter 1 of the dissertation. In a digitally emerging country like India, for any activist group or movement to build a public and political agenda on a contentious issue such as rape and sexual harassment, advocates need to work simultaneously with social media, news media and journalists. In India, for example, this dependence of grassroots activists on the Internet is reversed. The grassroots activists rely on journalists and mainstream news media to get and disseminate information. This helps to successfully build a public agenda.

Ianelli (2016), in her recently published book, *Hybrid Politics: Media and Participation*, proposes moving “beyond the single medium approach” in activism and political participation (pp. 36), and instead focusing on the co-existence of diverse forms of media to promote social and political participation. As Chadwick and Smith (2016) outline, advocacy groups first create a campaign for online platforms and then transfer the same campaign to the news media. This strategy works for digitally developed countries, where there is a relatively low digital-divide. In a digitally emerging country like India, the relationship between social media platforms and mainstream media in feminist activism should be more simultaneous, interdependent and

concurrent to build an agenda, where campaign on the issue should be focused on equally on digital platforms and in the news media.

The theoretical background to this present study answers relevant questions about the news media coverage of rape and sexual violence in India, anti-rape feminist activism and the role of different media platforms in building an agenda. Universally, rape and sexual assault media coverage share certain similarities, such as doubting the claims of the victim or the survivor; and to a large extent shaming them. Women of marginalized communities have to face further indignation due to the social and economical position. Their stories are lost in the daily news-cycle and in the social media outrage of ‘prominent’ rapes and sexual harassment. But every country and culture has a varied set of economical, social and political framework, which is the deciding factor of how media and the internet operate in the country. What works in some countries may not work in the others and that hold true for digital activism against rape and sexual harassment too. In any digitally emerging country, therefore, it is important to focus on all forms of media to build a public agenda against rape and sexual assault. Through this study, I will discuss effective methods for creating a public agenda for anti-rape feminist activism in digitally emerging countries like India.

Chapter 3: Method

The overarching question of this study is how, and to what degree, the coverage of rape and sexual assault in India has been affected by the rise of social media. In this chapter I will focus on the selection of a research strategy and method, the process of data collection, and the challenges experienced in studying the sensitive issue of rape and sexual assault and the feminist activist response to it in the Indian context. Before moving forward, it is important to be clear on the distinction between the concepts of method and methodology. Schneider (2010) defines research methods as the technical steps taken to do research. Methodology also includes the description of the theoretical concepts that inform the choice of methods to be applied (Bryman, 2008). I will begin by discussing the feminist perspective that underpins the methodological choices, then I will talk about the rationale for choosing particular methods and how they were employed to answer the research questions of this study, and finally I will discuss what steps were taken to ensure the validity of the data and the ethical concerns and considerations that arose during this project.

The sections in this chapter are as follows:

1. *Selecting a feminist research and method strategy*: This section is on the research process and strategy, specifically focusing on the purpose of the research strategy and how it was decided on.
2. *Qualitative interviews*: This section focuses on the recruitment of participants and interview procedures, including the recruitment procedure, sample size and co-fielding challenges. I conducted qualitative interviews with feminist activists and journalists to analyze the relationship between feminist activists and journalists in building the agenda on rape and sexual assault.
3. *Thematic Analysis*: This section is on the method of qualitative thematic analysis of newspaper coverage of three rape cases that occurred in India in 2005, 2012 and 2016. I discuss

the data collection and the procedure for selecting the themes for analysis. The thematic analysis of the news media coverage assesses whether, and in what way, there has been a shift in the reporting of rape and sexual assault with the introduction of social media platforms in India. Analyzing print news media is a common method in feminist media research to understand the “unacknowledged” and “subconscious” dominant ideology of the readers and the society. It also helps in providing a critical perspective of the gendered news coverage of rape and sexual assault (Hesse-Biber, 2013).

4. *Social media analysis*: This section is on the procedure and analysis of data from social media platforms, specifically Facebook, in this study. The section focuses on the various methods such as data-scraping of comments; data visualization of network and word cloud analysis of the comments. Analysis of social media platforms as participatory spaces for women is a popular feminist media research method to understand what women express and how they connect on issues of gendered violence (Hesse-Biber, 2013).

5. *Validation of data*: This section is on the process of validating the data of the study. Rather than the traditional concepts of data validity and reliability, I have instead chosen to use Guba’s (1981) recommended concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. The rationale for this approach is discussed.

6. *Ethical challenges and dilemmas*: This section is on the ethical considerations and dilemmas that I confronted during the research process. Since there were various types of ethical challenges, I classified them into legal, ethical, and social-political challenges.

Selecting a feminist research strategy and methodology

I self-identify as a third-wave feminist; hence it was natural for me to adopt a feminist approach to my dissertation. The third wave of feminism, which emerged in the late 1980s-early

1990s and includes a focus on gender violence and rape (Yu, 2009), is also central to my dissertation. I argue that third-wave feminism¹⁷ provides a platform and context to transnational feminism and intersectionality, by being inclusive of the rights of all categories of women, irrespective of their color, nationality, sexuality and ability (Yu, 2009). This feminist stance also guides my research methods.

This study is at the intersection of feminist scholarship and media scholarship, and so feminist media research is relevant in influencing the research goals. Feminist research methods have also influenced the conception of feminist media research. Hesse-Biber (2013, pp. 265) explains feminist media research as:

Feminist media research raises and provides answers to questions about patterns of gender within mediated text. The fact on skin be simple or complex, concrete or more abstract; but whatever that form, feminist media research provides a method of delimiting, analyzing, and explaining the flower and significance of these patterns.

The feminist methodology is based on non-hierarchical, interactive approach to feminist research. The influence of this methodology influences in selecting a research method uploading feminist ideals of equality and interaction (King, 1994). According to Fonow and Cook (2005), who assert that feminist methodology “refers to a variety of methodological stances, conceptual approaches, and research strategies,” feminist research goals involve:

- Reducing the distance between the researcher and the researched;
- Collaboration;

¹⁷ Third-wave feminism emerged after the second-wave feminism. The first wave formally 51 began at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, where Elizabeth Stanton drafted the famous Seneca Falls Declaration declaring the goals and ideology to provide opportunities for women, including them in political suffrage (Cullen-DuPont, 2009, pp. 234-235). However, the first wave of feminism was limited to the demography of white, middle-class women. The second wave of feminism came much later in the 1960s, intertwined with the other movements of the time, the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam war movement.

- Emancipation: the goal is liberation of the researcher.

In this research, I have tried to achieve these feminist research goals by embracing my social and political identity and acknowledging both my privilege and lack of privilege in order to reduce the distance between myself and the participants during the interview process. For instance, I pointed out that although I have certain *privileges* as an upper-caste Indian women residing in a first world economy, I am also a non-immigrant woman of color in the US, a status that can limit the opportunities available to me. Treating the entire process like a conversation definitely helped in reducing the distance between us. The traditional subject-researcher relationship is hierarchical, in which the researcher asks, and the subject answers. There is little to no room for conversation and collaboration. The interview process in my study was collaborative since the suggestions of the participants were used to create an application as part of the recommendations.

Many feminist researchers (see Eckert, 2014) have often followed Fonow and Cook's (2005) feminist research principles – which include reflexivity, action orientation, attention to affective components of research, and the use of the situation at hand – in designing their studies. I have incorporated these principles in the following manner.

- Reflexivity: According to Fonow and Cook, reflexivity involves an acknowledgement and critical analysis of the role of the researcher. Within the research process, I have been conscious of my own position as an Indian woman who has experienced sexual harassment. For them, I became a person they could relate to, my identity was not just that of a researcher from a remote location. I embraced my identity and activism through this study and I continue to keep in touch with them. It may be viewed as a trade-off but I needed to immerse myself in the situation.

- Action orientation: Fonow and Cook state that feminist research should not be study *of* women but study *for* women. That is to say, they make a case for studying people not to extract knowledge, but instead to create beneficial changes. And this has precisely been my purpose, to collect data and thus help feminist activists understand how they can most effectively utilize the converged power of media platforms to build an agenda against sexual violence in India.
- Attention to affective components of research: Talking to participants about rape and sexual harassment was a mildly distressing and confounding experience for me. Among myriad emotions, I felt guilty about asking some of the participants to relive their ordeal, but I was also pleased when some of them said they felt liberated to speak about the issue. And of course, I was reliving many personal experiences of sexual harassment from the time I was 13 years old.
- Use of the situation “at hand”: Fonow and Cook also assert that the researcher should avoid the “will to control” research participants, and be open to contingencies and spontaneous developments. In this project, while I undertook semi-structured interviews, I not only let the participants lead the conversations and do most of the talking, but also let them talk about other issues related to women and violence. This gave me deeper insight into their views in ways that might not have been possible if I had tried to limit our conversations to my pre-determined questions.

In the next section on the methods, I will discuss which research questions are best answered by which methods. These questions collectively help me to answer the larger question of the impact of feminist activism and social media platforms on rape coverage in news media in India:

RQ1: How do feminist activists use social media platforms to build a public and political agenda against rape and sexual harassment/assault in India?

RQ2: How do feminist activists network with journalists to build a public and political agenda against rape and sexual harassment/assault in India?

RQ3: Which media platforms are advantageous for feminist activists to build an agenda on issues of rape and sexual assault?

RQ4: What is the impact of social media on the nature of news media coverage of rape and sexual assault?

RQ 5: What are the patterns of mainstream media coverage in incidents of rape?

RQ 6: How did the feminist activist groups use Facebook to build public agenda on the two rape cases?

To answer the research questions, I used a triangulated approach, conducting a mixed method study of qualitative interviews, qualitative thematic analysis of Indian print news coverage of three specific rape cases, and analysis of the social-media content of feminist groups on Facebook. Creswell et al. (2003) have defined mixed method study as “integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis in a single study or a program of enquiry.” Some methodologists, including Creswell (2013), and Patton (2013), argue that mixed-method approaches integrate data through multiple methods. I will start by discussing the qualitative interviews and then move on to the rest of the methods.

Qualitative Interviews

The first two research questions were addressed through qualitative interviews:

RQ1: How do feminist activists use social media platforms to build a public and political agenda against rape and sexual harassment/assault in India?

RQ 2: How do feminist activists network with journalists to build a public and political agenda against rape and sexual harassment/assault in India?

Grossoehme (2014), defines qualitative research in terms of this technique stating that qualitative research is “the systematic collection, organization, and interpretation of textual material derived from talk or conversation.” Interviewing feminist activists shed light on how they chose and used different social media platforms to engage with the public, journalists and policy-makers. Meanwhile, interview data from both feminist activists and journalists explained the relationships between them as well as their successes and challenges in communicating and engaging with one another in order to build a public and political agenda against rape and sexual harassment in India.

These conversations are derived from the interviews, in which the participants shared their experiences through a series of questions and answers (Grossoehme, 2014). The purpose of qualitative interviews is not only to assess the research questions but also to understand and focus on the lived experiences of the participants (Seidman, 2013; Grossoehme, 2014).

I interviewed 30 journalists and 35 feminist activists for a total of 65 interviews. Table 1 provides a demographic description of the participants.

Table 1 Demographic data for interview participants

	Gender		Interview language		Location		Experience	
	Male	Female	English	Hindi or Bengali	City	Rural area	Average (years)	Range (years)
Journalists	19	11	10	20	30	0	12.24	7 - 40
Feminist activists	0	35	14	21	15	20	6.09	2 - 30
TOTAL	19	46	24	41	45	20	N/A	N/A

I tried to recruit a heterogeneous sample for the interviews, however, most of the journalists were based in cities. India is a culturally, socially, economically and linguistically diverse country. The thirty journalists I spoke with represented all the four major geographical zones in India (North, South, East and West). I did not restrict myself to journalists who worked in English language media; I also interviewed journalists working in Indian language media organizations. Journalist participants also represented diverse media platforms – radio, television, print and online.

The feminist activist participants were equally diverse; they came from all four major zones, and an almost equal number came from rural and urban areas. Some spoke English and the others communicated in Indian languages like Bengali and Hindi, which I am fluent in. According to the Census report of 2011, Hindi and Bengali are also the most spoken languages in India, where 22 languages are recognized as national languages. I was not able to interview grass-root feminist activists from rural Southern India because of my inability to speak the various languages of the region. Instead I relied on urban feminist activists from Southern India, who spoke English.

Recruitment and interview sample size

To identify participants, I employed a purposive, or snowball, sampling technique for this study: “Snowball sampling consists of identifying respondents who are then used to refer researchers on to other respondents” (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Snowball sampling is used to locate a hard-to-reach population (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Journalists and feminist activists would not be comfortable discussing sensitive issues of rape and sexual harassment with an unknown researcher. Snowball sampling worked as a referral for me to recruit journalists and feminist activists.

In terms of recruiting journalists, I was aided by the fact that I was a former journalist and had worked in the newsrooms of one leading English daily and other broadcast media. I reached out to journalists whom I knew and asked them to forward my request to colleagues who might be willing to be interviewed. In the case of feminist activists, I identified an initial group of participants through references from my former colleagues and others whom I had read about in newspapers and emailed.

I invited participants to the study by emailing journalists, feminist advocacy groups and feminist activists. Journalist participants were from print, television, and online media, while some feminist activists were part of organizations, others worked as activists individually. Subsequently, after the interviews were completed, I requested the participants to send information about the study to other suitable participants. Around 80 individuals responded to the recruitment, leading to 65 interviews. The rest fell through due to scheduling conflicts and the decision of potential participants to withdraw after receiving the consent form.

This dissertation examines the use of media by feminist activists in building agenda on sexual violence against women in India. Therefore, journalists and feminist activists were best

suited to discuss how they interact and connect with one another.¹⁸ I decided not to include politically affiliated feminist activists in the interview process because, as a former journalist, I found that in India they tend to be heavily influenced by the political ideology of their parties and their actions depend on whether their party is in power. In a strange contradiction, I also faced strict gatekeeping by some of the urban professionalized NGOs, thwarting my efforts to interview them or other activists affiliated to the organization. As much as feminism is based on the concept of equality of genders and individuals, the core values of feminism were not present in the strict hierarchical organizational structure of these NGOs. For the feminist activists, I decided to email prospective candidates, inviting them to participate.

At the beginning of the interview process, I went to India for three weeks to conduct interviews. However, I could not complete all the interviews during my stay. I continued interviewing journalists and activists after returning from India to the United States. All the interviews were completed over 10 months, from January to October 2016. Most of the interviews conducted in January 2016 were face to face, while the rest were by phone and Skype. After my return to the U.S., scheduling the interviews became challenging due to the significant time difference. However, my participants were aware of this problem and accommodated me to the best of their ability. While the majority of interviews lasted for about 45 minutes, others went over an hour, when the participant became deeply involved in the interactive interview. I asked my participants for permission to audio record the interviews. All the participants consented to

¹⁸ In chapter 2, in the discussion on the genesis and categorization of the feminist movement in India, I have indicated that some feminist groups were affiliated with political parties and some were autonomous.

this. Most of the interviews were conducted in English but around 20 interviews were conducted in Bengali and Hindi.¹⁹

Saturation

Qualitative methodologists are unlikely or even unable to agree on the exact sample sizes needed for qualitative studies; however, they generally agree that data saturation and theoretical saturation are the deciding factors in determining the number of interviews to be conducted.

Marshall et al. (2013) define reaching saturation when no new information is gathered from the data and it keeps returning to the same information.

Previous studies have suggested that 30-40 interviews are enough to substantiate epistemological claims, where fifteen is the smallest acceptable sample in qualitative research (Guest et al 2006; Mason, 2010). Other studies, which use multiple methods, have recommended 45-55 interviews (Creswell, 1998; Lokot, 2016). I had initially decided to do 100 interviews of 20-30 minutes each. However, with most interviews taking 40-45 minutes of conversation, and some even going as long as 60 minutes, I gradually found that I was not obtaining any new information and so decided to stop when I had conducted 65 interviews. I also learned that there is no real 'perfect' number and that plans can and should be adjusted to fit the research results/needs.

Interview process

Qualitative interviews can be structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Jamshed, 2014). I used semi-structured interviews, which enabled me to follow a loosely connected set of questions and keep the interviews on track. I also encouraged the participants to ask questions to make them feel comfortable and create a bond with them. Most of them asked me why I decided

¹⁹ I translated the consent form in Hindi and Bengali for some of the participants.

to study issues surrounding rape and sexual assault. Some journalists asked me about my experiences in the newsroom while most feminist activists asked me if, and when, I had experienced harassment. Most grass-root feminist activists asked me about sexual harassment in the United States.

During the interviews, the feminist activists were asked to explain how they use the media for activism, how they select specific sexual assault cases for media coverage, and what is the end goal of feminist activism in building an agenda on rape and sexual assault. Journalists were asked how they decide which rape case to cover, whether activists become sources for journalists, and whether they interact with policymakers and journalists through social media platforms (for the full questions, please refer to Appendix 1). The results of the interviews, combined with the data from social media analysis and thematic analysis, provided in-depth insights into how activists use different media platforms to build public and political agendas on sexual assault against women.

Holmgren (2011) in her work on qualitative interviews introduces the concept of “co-fielding”, which is characterized by an intersection between the identities or positions of the interviewee and the interviewer: “The similarity or overlapping of positions can be based on social categorization in terms of gender, race, age, class, and so on, but it can just as well refer to everyday activities based on a common interest and engagement in the subject matter” (Holmgren, 2011, pp. 366). According to Holmgren, co-fielding practices can downplay the power differences between interviewer and interviewee and democratize the relationship (Holmgren, 2011). As a former journalist and a feminist, I share a common interest, engagement, and background with the participant groups. As a result, I was able to engage in this practice

during interviews, enabling me to conduct interactive conversations in which both feminists and journalists felt comfortable talking to me.

When I disclosed to the feminist activist participants that I identified myself as a feminist, they were more forthcoming with their answers. Similarly, most journalists discussed newsroom practices, with which I could easily identify. There was a two-way communication and they asked my opinion in the form of a conversation, “Don’t you think so... You must have experienced this... if you remember the coverage was different...”. Holmgren (2011) refers to this as a consensual interaction, in which both the interviewee and the interviewer have *overlapping positions* of identity and experiences. However, there can arise situations where the interview and the interviewer might misread each other. For instance, the interviewee may assume that the interviewer would always understand his/her line of thought, such as by stating “You know what I am saying?” (Holmgren, 2011). If the interviewer goes along with the interviewee without clarifying their position, it can result in misinterpretation of information.

This problem did occur during my interviews. Journalists would occasionally say during the interviews, “You were here, working in Indian newsrooms, you know how this works.” Similarly, while talking about rape and sexual harassment, the feminist activists connected emotionally with me and said, “It was the same sort of harassment you must have been through.” Each time, when I was in such a co-fielding situation, I had to politely intervene and ask for more details, “I am sure, but can you elaborate more on this?” But despite these challenges, employing a co-fielding strategy was nevertheless helpful as my position was not that of a distant observer or interviewer; I was being considered one of them, “an insider.” Since I also wanted participants to feel that they were collaborators in this study, at the end of the interview process, I invited

them to read the interview transcripts. Two feminist activists agreed, but no one else expressed a desire to read the transcripts.

Thematic Analysis of News Coverage of Rape and Sexual Assault in India

To discuss the following research questions, I will use the method of thematic analysis:

RQ4: What is the impact of social media on the nature of news media coverage on rape and sexual assault?

RQ5: What are the patterns of mainstream media coverage in incidents of rape?

Thematic analysis is an independent qualitative descriptive approach that is mainly described as “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 79). Thematic analysis identifies complex patterns in qualitative research interviews and published texts, providing an exhaustive analysis of the qualitative data (DeSantis & Noel Ugarriza, 2000; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Scholars also emphasize the flexibility of the method of thematic analysis. Robinson (2012) writes that there is no association between data collection and data analysis in thematic analysis, giving the researcher the flexibility to start data analysis anytime. Thematic analysis is also appropriate for any study that deals with multiple types of participants and data collection. Hence, I decided to use the method of thematic analysis to answer research questions four and five. Robinson (2012) argues:

Thematic Analysis provides a comprehensive process for a researcher to identify numerous cross-references between the evolving themes and the entire data. By using Thematic Analysis, it is possible to link the various concepts and opinions of participants and compare them with the data that has been gathered in different situations at different times from other or the same participants during the project. In this case, the potential for interpretation becomes infinite.

To understand the coverage and framing of the news reports on rape and sexual assault, I identified the main themes in the coverage of the three cases of rape and sexual assault published in two leading English newspapers The Times of India and Hindustan Times, because

they rank in the top three circulated English newspapers in India (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2016). The Indian media has been known to frame women and their roles in cultural values in Indian mass media; eulogizing of the discourses of chastity of womanhood is strongly present in the cultural framing of women in the Indian media (Fong & Chung, 2004).

To study if there has been any shift in the coverage of rape and sexual assault after the advent of social media platforms in campaigns and newsrooms India, thematic analysis is the appropriate method. Thematic analysis would point out if new categories in the framing of rape and sexual harassment stories were identified. Since thematic analysis emphasizes the context of both the manifest and latent content; the literal meaning and the underlying meaning of the content (Vaismoradi et. al., 2013), in the three cases that I explored I looked for references to social media platforms in the articles to evaluate if there have been shifts in the news media reporting due to the influence of social media platforms.

I gathered newspaper articles on sexual assault on women from three specific cases between 2000-2016. As of March 31st, 2015, nearly 15,000 newspapers are registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India.²⁰ I decided to focus on the top two leading English publications of India: *The Times of India* and *The Hindustan Times*.²¹

These are the three significant cases of rape, in which the women were raped and murdered:

1. Pratibha Srikanth Murthy's rape and murder on December 24, 2005, in Bangalore, made headlines in 2005-2006. Murthy was raped and murdered by the driver of her company

²⁰ Data and statistics gathered from <http://rni.nic.in>

²¹ According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations in India, these three English newspapers were the most circulated English newspapers in India during Jan-Jun 2015. (<http://www.auditbureau.org>)

allotted vehicle on her way to work. Murthy's rape helped in bringing about better security measures for women employees working late night shifts in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and IT industry.

2. Jyoti Singh Pandey's gang rape and murder on December 16, 2012, in Delhi, which is often referred to as the watershed moment in feminist activism. The young paramedical student in Delhi was gang-raped and brutalized by four people in a moving bus. She died from her injuries within two weeks of the incident. This caused worldwide protests and uproar.
3. Jisha's rape and murder on April 28, 2016, in Perumbavoor (Kerala), which is similar to the Jyoti Singh Pandey case in its brutality. Here, a 30-year-old lower caste (Dalit) woman was brutally gang raped and murdered. Some media coverage indicated that the brutality in this case was greater than the Delhi gang rape case, but it failed to get similar attention from the media or the policymakers.²²

I decided to focus on these three cases of rape for the following reasons:

- a. To analyze whether there has been any change in the coverage of rape in newspapers over a period of seven years. The first case happened in 2005 and the next one in 2012. I was specifically interested to see if there have been any changes to the framing of the articles after social media platforms made inroads in Indian newsrooms around 2009-10.
- b. The 2012 gang rape is often referred to as the breakpoint moment in feminist activism in India by scholars and journalists (Rao, 2013, Durham, 2013). I wanted to analyze the response to the 2016 rape case and understand if there has been a widespread change in rape coverage or whether the coverage of the 2012 gang rape case represented an outlier. There

²² <http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/keralas-nirbhaya-jisha-not-worthy-our-attention-if-not-compared-jyoti-42669>

were many similarities between the 2012 and 2016 gang rape cases, but a comparison of media coverage and public and political response would indicate if the framing of rape and sexual assault had changed.

- c. Finally, in all the three cases the women were brutally raped and killed, unlike some of the other cases. The coverage of rape incidents when the victim survives is different compared to when the victim dies. When a rape victim dies, there is more media coverage of her rape and murder and raises questions about rape and safety of women.

Using the thematic analysis method, I tracked the changes in the coverage of sexual violence against women across the three cases to understand whether technological changes had any influence on the coverage of sexual violence against women. Facebook was released to the public in India in 2008 and journalists, including myself, instantly started using the platform. Although it had limited functions compared to the present, it emerged as a useful journalism resource to find sources, find stories and communicate with other journalists. In 2011, India faced an anti-corruption social movement aided by social media platforms, where Indian journalists would source stories from Twitter and Facebook (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2013; Paulssen & Harder, 2014). This was a defining moment for journalists and activists due to the public acceptance of the movement. In the context of sexual assault, 2013 emerged as a watershed year for coverage in India, following the Delhi gang rape of December 2012 (Jolly, 2016).

Sample and sample size in selecting the articles

I downloaded 542 articles on the three incidents of rape published in the two most widely circulated English newspapers in India from Lexis Nexis (Table 2), based on the keywords, rape,

2005 Bangalore rape, 2012 Delhi gang rape, 2016 Kerala rape, Nirbhaya, Damini, Jisha and Pratibha.

Table 2 Articles on the three rape and murder cases downloaded from the Times of India and the Hindustan Times

Name of victim	Place and date of Incident	No. of articles	Date range of data collection
Pratibha Srikanth Murthy	Bangalore December 13, 2005	13	12/14/2005 to 12/28/2005
Jyoti Singh Pandey	Delhi December 16, 2012	500	12/17/2012 to 12/31/2012
Jisha	Perumbavoor, Kerala, April 28, 2016	29	4/29/2016 to 5/12/2016

Selecting the themes

Meyers (1997) has identified ways in which reporters could better handle stories of violence against women by improving their sourcing, giving voice to survivors, being sensitive to issues of race and class, and taking all forms of violence seriously. Similarly, Durham's (2013) study of media coverage of a gang rape focuses on sources and quotes, and semantics and style (for instance, the use of the passive voice which absolves rapists of agency, shifting the cause of the rape to some unknown power that seemingly acted upon the men). Media coverage

of rape and other forms of sexual violence has been found to influence social attitudes and legal measures regarding these phenomena. The construction of rape victims as either “virgin” or “vamp”, “good girl” or “bad girl”, “innocent victim” or “deserving accomplice” have been repeatedly found in studies of the framing of rape and gendered violence in the news. While these analyses have been done in the context of Western countries, I am interested in examining whether similar categorizations and patterns of coverage are evident in the Indian context, albeit with some modifications, such as replacing the frame of race with that of caste.

Based on the past research on rape and sexual assault frames and the following steps (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000, pp.139-140), I have replicated the process of thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87). Thus, I first familiarized myself with the data by reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas. I generated initial themes by coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code. I searched for themes, collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme, and then reviewed these themes to determine whether they appropriately reflected the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic map. Prasad’s (1994) categorization of news articles from 1981-1988 on dowry-related violence also helped me to formulate my categories: Since Prasad’s research is based on coverage of violence against women in Indian publications, I decided there would be similarities in his categorization. He used a comparative analysis to include both English publications and regional language publications (Telegu), creating the following codes to categorize the news articles:

- Victim’s background – age, education, and occupation
- Background of the victim’s husband
- Nature and pattern of giving dowry

- Duration of marriage and the diamonds incident
- Location where the incident took place
- Type of abuse/nature of death
- Nature of demands leading to conflict
- Persons participating in the abuse of the women
- Types of ending/outcomes
- Types of reporting the endings/outcomes

The categories on the victim's background, the husband's background and the location of the incident had a strong influence on my themes. Similarly, some of the themes include the background of the victim, the background of the perpetrator, the location of the incident, and its impact on the coverage of the news article.

Based on the above-mentioned categories from Prasad and the steps indicated by Wimmer and Dominick, my research design employed the following categories to analyze the manifest and latent themes in the coverage of rape and sexual assault in the selected Indian papers:

1. News values: Ethical decisions taken in newsrooms and the commodification of news ("what sells as news") also influence the framing of rape. This theme also includes other sub-themes of *celebrity and entertainment, power elite* and *newspaper agenda*. The sub-themes include quotes from celebrities and involvement of celebrities in a cause; power elites include political leadership, involvement of business leaders and other leaders in any social or political cause, and promoting the newspaper or media organization agenda through media coverage.

2. **Family honor and shame:** Feminist researchers have used this category while studying the news coverage on rape and sexual assault, in which the media equates rape with loss of family honor and shame (Lodhia, 2015).
3. **Class and Caste:** Class and caste are indications of socio-economic status in India. This category analyzed if the quality and quantity of media coverage of rape and sexual assault was based on the socio-economic class of both the perpetrator and the victim (Rapp et al. 2010).
4. **Location:** The category of location analyzed if media coverage of rape and sexual assault was dependent on the geographical location of the incident (Rao, 2014; Dreze & Sen, 2013).
5. **Mention of activists:** This category examined whether media frames refer to activists and their activism on raising awareness about gender equality and safety, while discussing the causes of rape and sexual assault in India.
6. **Public agenda:** This category examined how the newspapers framed the agenda of the citizens in rape and sexual assaults cases, analyzing how issues of public concern were identified and framed.
7. **Mention of social media platforms:** This category analyzed the role of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Change.org and various other internet based platforms, in rape and sexual assault coverage.
8. **Politicizing rape:** This category examined if rape and sexual assault incidents are politicized by the media and political parties.

Themes two and three will support the operationalization of the intersectionality theory. Crenshaw's (1991) theorization is an example of how we should be simultaneously responsive to gendered and racialized dimensions of violence and oppression targeting women of color. Her detailed analysis of sexual assault shows that the bodies of women of color are valued according

to their race and gender. I have included the category of caste here, to make it relevant and representative of the sample from India.

Social media analysis

I selected social media analysis to answer a part of the final research question:

RQ 6: How did the feminist activist groups use Facebook to build public agenda on the two rape cases?

For this analysis, I first asked the feminist activist interviewees about their preference for different media platforms in building the agenda. In addition, I wanted to understand more broadly how citizens are engaging on social media platforms such as Facebook on issues related to feminist activism. To answer this question, I analyzed the Facebook pages of feminist activist groups to assess whether public engagement increases when rape or sexual harassment cases are reported and to explore the kind of posts published. I decided to focus on Facebook since 51% of Internet users in India actively use Facebook, while only 17% of social media users in India use Twitter (Jain, 2016).

This method of using thematically analyzing social media content is a comparatively new approach (Lai & To 2015). Due to the complexity of the platform, a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis is most suitable for exploring social media content. Among the challenges in developing a design for analysis of social media content is that thematic analysis, or even content analysis, does not help us to understand the nature and extent of user engagement on social media platforms. For instance, through thematic analysis it would not be possible to answer questions about which feminist groups on Facebook connect with other groups, or how they campaign on an issue, what kind of content they post, or the nature of their engagement with the public.

Indeed, Roller and Lavrakas (2015) show that conventional textual and content analysis may not be applicable to analyze social media content and that complications can develop when interactions are limited to the use of hyperlinks rather than actual information; finding common themes and patterns might be time-consuming and intimidating for the researcher.

Content from social media, especially Twitter, is rarely consistent; Twitter has high peaks and drops, which can be a challenge in data collection and design (Wu et al., 2011). To overcome this challenge, Giglietto and Selva (2014) designed their study to analyze Twitter data on a particular topic during peak time. Although they claim the sole focus on peak time concentrated their study from “big” data to “deep” data (pp.264), the sampling of content extracted during peak time may not be representative of the content and engagement. Designing an appropriate framework for social media analysis becomes challenging when the content issue is rape and sexual assault because it is considered a taboo issue and Facebook users may not publicly voice their true opinion due to the lack of anonymity. The challenges become manifest when media and social media frames are analyzed in a digitally emerging country like India.

For analyzing the content of large data sets from Twitter and Facebook, recent scholarship has indicated that computer-mediated text analysis is most beneficial. Papacharissi and Olieviera (2013) suggest that a computer-mediated text analysis tool can be used to identify volume and content patterns, topics, and prominent frames in the Twitter posts:

The computer-mediated text analysis is conducted concurrently with a more focused discourse analysis, which examines both the patterns plotted by the content analysis and the archives themselves to understand the form and the content of news that is communicated via Twitter. (pp.11)

I used NodeXL, Facebook Application Programming Interface (API) and Netvizz to download the publicly available content of Facebook posts, images, and memes. Netvizz, a Facebook application, allows downloading of Facebook data from specific pages for a specific

duration, and has a search function which I used to find anti-rape activism pages originating in India. I found 58 pages on anti-rape feminism based on the key words anti-rape feminism in India, Feminist organizations in India and anti-rape organizations in India and downloaded data for the pages that had fan counts of 1000 and more, reducing the count to nine Facebook pages, of which only three were still active. The remainder had become inactive or had stopped posting after 2015. Since I wanted to analyze the posts and the network connections generated after the murder and rape of Jyoti Singh in 2012 and Jisha in 2016, I could not take into consideration the pages that stopped posting after 2015. I then used the Facebook API to check and extract the creation date for each of the pages and noted that most were initiated in 2012 and early 2013, after Jyoti Singh's rape and murder happened. The three pages that I used for this analysis were

1. Breakthrough India;
2. Feminism in India; and
3. 21st Century India, "Against RAPE."

I want to mention one page, ShesAgainstRape, which had one of highest fan counts, at 6,119. It was one of the most active Facebook pages until 2015, but as it was not active during Jisha's rape and murder, I decided not to include it for analysis because it would not include any intereaction after Jisha's rape and murder in 2016.

I used the data visualization tool Tableau and Gephi to visualize these pages, and assess the categories of page comments, likes, shares, posts, and the nature of the publication. I completed a detailed analysis of the specific pages and groups in each category.

I compared the quantity and quality of the number of posts on these group pages when a rape and/or sexual harassment case had been reported in the mainstream media. By quality I mean if the focus was on the rape and murder or if the focus shifted to other issues such as

rhetorics of political leaders. I decided to focus on Facebook posts after Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder and Jisha's rape and murder.

To understand user engagement on the Facebook pages of feminist campaigns, such as *Feminism in India*, *Breakthrough India* and *21st Century India Against Rape*, I used the Netvizz v1.25 Facebook app to chart user engagement and comments. This is a free app, which has the following multiple functionalities:

Group data - creates networks and tabular files for user activity around posts on groups

Page data - creates networks and tabular files for user activity around posts on pages

Page like network - creates a network of pages connected through the likes between them

Search - interface to Facebook's search function

Link stats - provides statistics for links shared on Facebook

These data and statistics from the Facebook pages of the feminist campaigns provided an insight into the process of online network building around incidents of rape and sexual abuse.

I used the pro-version of NodeXL and the Facebook API to retrieve data from Facebook and the pro-version of MAXQDA to analyze it. The advantages of using a software package to analyze data are the following (Hoyes & Barnes, 2012):

- It is beneficial to the analytic approach.
- The software supports coding, memos, annotation, and data linking. It is saved in a single platform without having to look at separate folders.
- The software supports an efficient search and retrieval process. It can be as specific as looking for a single theme or even a single word.
- The software can handle and store large amounts of data.
- It forces detailed analysis of text

There are both advantages and disadvantages to using computer-assisted programs for thematic analysis. With the increase in studies on the Internet and social media platforms, there has also been a rise in the use of computer-assisted software for analyzing themes and content. However, there is contention between human-based thematic analysis and computer assisted analysis programs. Volkens et al. (2007) discuss the pros and cons of content analysis and computer assisted programs:

Advocates of human-based content analysis think that texts can only be understood in the cultural context, according to the political status quo and in line with the socio-economic processes of a country. They are suspicious of formalized techniques of text analysis, whether wholly or partially computerized, because speech-act theory shows that the intentions of speakers have important implications and that texts have meanings, which no computer can capture (Bara, Weale & Biquelet, 2007). While human-based content analysis is accused of being unreliable, computer-based content analysis is castigated for missing out in semantic validity. (pp.236)

Validating data

Kadushin et al. (2008) define triangulation as, “measuring the same concept using two or more methods”. Patton (2013) and Golafshani (2003) propose that multiple methods of data collection and multiple methods of data analysis test the validity and reliability of the study. The mixed methods approach is becoming increasingly popular due to its potential to triangulate by drawing from the strengths of the qualitative and quantitative approaches to data analysis. Qualitative researchers have often grappled with the issue of how they can test the validity and reliability of their research in the absence of quantitative measures (Lauri, 2011). Consequently, qualitative scholars Guba (1981) and Silverman (2001) have proposed alternative ways to test validity and reliability in qualitative research. Guba (1981) proposes the four criteria outlined in Table 3 to increase the trustworthiness of a study.

Table 3 Scientific and Naturalistic Terms Appropriate to the Four Aspects of Trustworthiness (Guba, 1981, pp. 80)

Aspect	Scientific Term	Naturalistic Term
Truth Value	Internal Validity	Credibility
Applicability	External Validity Generalizability	Transferability
Consistency	Reliability	Dependability
Neutrality	Objectivity	Confirmability

I followed Guba’s analogy of trustworthiness to ensure valid and reliable findings from the data gathered through thematic analysis, interviews, and social media analysis. According to Guba (1981):

- (i) Credibility can be used in place of internal validity. Credibility is possible through data and method triangulation, along with prolonged engagement with the participants.
- (ii) Transferability can be used in place of external validity/generalizability. Transferability is made possible when the results can be replicated or transferred to another study.
- (iii) Dependability can be used in place of reliability. It is achieved through member checking or others checking the analysis.
- (iv) Confirmability can be used in place of objectivity. Confirmability is assessed through an in-depth analysis

Credibility

To ensure the credibility of a study, Guba proposes the following methods:

- Prolonged engagement at a site
- Persistent observation
- Peer debriefing

- Member checks
- Collection of referential adequacy materials
- Triangulation

I spent a long time engaging with my interviewees and then, during data analysis, with various textual materials. In addition to interviewing the participants, I read their published work to engage with the study better. I also read archival materials such as the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) to verify the official statistics on rape and sexual violence in India over the past few years.

After the study, as suggested by Guba, I tested the interpretation of the data against the thematic analysis of the newspaper coverage and Facebook posts to be certain that there were no internal conflicts or contradictions between the NCRB data, interview, and thematic analysis. The NCRB records were particularly useful in establishing “structural coherence” and “referential adequacy,” which Guba proposes to eradicate inconsistency.

Transferability

The transferability of the study depends on the replicability of the study in another context. Guba recommends developing a detailed description of the analysis to facilitate its replication in other studies. This study contains a detailed discussion of the manner in which the study was conducted and hence this study can be replicated in another South Asian country or any other digitally emerging country.

Dependability

Guba advocates the use of overlapping methods, or triangulation of methods, where different methods are employed simultaneously: “to overcome invalidities in individual methods; two or more methods are teamed in such a way that the weakness of one is overcome by the strength of the other.” Following Guba’s approach, I used three methods – interviews, thematic analysis of newspaper articles, and social media analysis – simultaneously to strengthen results.

I did not follow the stepwise replication and reliability of tests proposed by Guba since these were relevant to research projects with multiple collaborators and were not applicable to work undertaken by a single researcher. Instead, I continuously discussed the data with my advisors to ascertain the reliability of the study. This process helped me get feedback from my advisors and later my other committee members, which counterbalanced the need for multiple coders.

After the data collection process, Guba proposes establishing an "audit trail," whereby, an external auditor examines the process of data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation. For this study, my advisors and committee members played the role of the external auditors, providing me with feedback on the analysis.

Confirmability

To practice confirmability, Guba emphasizes the processes of triangulation and reflexivity. I engaged in triangulation using multiple methods as previously noted. After gathering the data and analyzing it, Guba recommends a confirmability audit, certifying that the data supports the theoretical assumption. The confirmability audit for this study will be included

in the followings chapters, during the discussion of the results and support for my theoretical assumptions.

Ethical considerations and dilemmas

I encountered several distinct legal, ethical, and research dilemmas while undertaking this research. For example, the Indian legal system prohibits the media, or any publication, from identifying or naming the victims of rape or sexual assault (Makhija, 2011), which in my view only contributes to the further stigmatization of women. However, coverage of rape and sexual assault is inconsistent; the news media sometimes identify victims and at other times use aliases. I have discussed this with journalists, feminist activists, and even lawyer friends, who did not have a plausible explanation. In this study, I have decided to identify the rape and murder victims.

I also grappled with the question of whether I should refer to the women who had endured rape and sexual violence as victims or survivors and discussed this dilemma with journalists and feminist activists during interviews. The majority of participants maintained that regardless of the term used (victim or survivor) the plight of the women remains the same. Some of the participants said that the term survivor gave the women a sense of empowerment. Yet others said that the use of the term survivors instead of victims was nothing more than a media stunt. I decided to use the terminology employed in the writings of women who have been raped or sexually assaulted and refer to the women as victims.²³

I was also concerned that I was exploiting my feminist research participants by asking them to share, and therefore relive, their experiences with me. In return, as a gesture of

²³ <http://everydayfeminism.com/2016/07/rape-victim-not-a-rape-survivor/>

appreciation I tried to help them identify a few funding opportunities, which is an ethical concern in this study.

I also struggled with ethical concerns while gathering data from social media platforms. I gathered non-identifiable data from publicly open and accessible pages on Facebook. Yet, anonymity and confidentiality continue to be issues when data is collected through online platforms. Ensuring the anonymity of participants in online data collection is difficult, especially since anonymous data from social media platforms can be made identifiable when it is paired with other information (Vitak et al., 2016). Online research subjects are sometimes unaware of monitoring, and often unable to control the kind of data collected for research. Online data subjects also have uneven opportunities to protect their data. Transparency is another challenge for social computing researchers. The various data collection tools such as Github, Facebook API and others simplify the process of collecting data, but researchers must decide whether and how to inform subjects of their presence and methods (AoIR, Vitak et al., 2016). Further, I acknowledge that any dangers or problems are outweighed by the benefit to doing the research.

A further concern is that of Internet connectivity and accessibility, since only 30% of the Indian population has access to the Internet (IAMAI-KPMG, 2015). Moreover, given that demographic variables such as race, gender, age, socioeconomic status, and technical experience influence the selection and usage of social network sites and online forums, data obtained from social media sites can lack representativeness (Vitak et al., 2016).

One of the biggest dilemmas was collecting data from Facebook. There are no clear guidelines on the collection of publicly available Facebook data; for instance, can information from public Facebook groups and/or pages be used for public research? Since I explicated data

(comments) from the Facebook pages of the feminist activist groups, I decided to follow the protocol stated on a document available on the UMD IRB website,

Early academic writings on internet privacy espoused a simple standard in which information communicated in a space open to the public could be considered public, whereas information exchanged strictly between two individuals should be considered private and subject to academic protocol relating to the acquisition of informed consent per Institutional Review Board guidelines.

This definition is still consistently used in academic research, where data from an open space is considered publicly available data. Other research groups such as AoIR (Association of Internet Researchers) also conform to similar views on gathering data from the social media platforms. However, there are still valid concerns as to how researchers should handle “public” data. In the recent past, publicly available data from social media platforms have been used to the detriment of the user or users (Carson, 2014). For instance, is the available public data intended to be made public by the user or it is public due to the accessibility of the platform? The issues of privacy, accessibility, and digital rights of the users are complicated and they become significant when fraught with issues of limited digital literacy. Unclear and changing ways in which material posted by individuals on social-media platforms is increasingly non-private, questioning the user intentionality. On a similar note, Vitak et al. (2016), argues that the online research subjects are not always aware of online monitoring and have unequal opportunities to protect their data. On the increasing loss of transparency in online data collection, Vitak et al. (2016) argue:

While individuals increasingly use privacy settings provided by social networks, researchers allied with host platforms may still have access to the data. Transparency is another challenge for social computing researchers. While social media’s affordances simplify the process of collecting data, researchers must decide whether and how to inform subjects of their presence, methods, and data collection.

This also refers to comments and status messages (data) collected from the Facebook pages of the feminist advocacy groups.

Keeping this dilemma in mind, I decided not to identify users who commented on the feminist group pages in Facebook and only referred to open Facebook pages, which are publicly available data.

I followed the ethical principles of social media data collection suggested by Vitak et al. (2016) and AoIR:

1. Being transparent about data collection
2. Ethical deliberation with peers: Discussing with scholars and researchers outside the directly involved individuals like advisors and committee members
3. Caution in sharing results

In conclusion, choosing methods in any research study depends on how well the research questions could be answered succinctly and if other researchers could replicate the study. As a feminist media research scholar, it was also essential for me to follow the feminist research method of studying for my participants not studying them and sharing with them my preliminary findings of the thematic analysis. The three different methods thematic analysis, interviews, and social media network analysis helped in augmenting the findings from each of the methods and the combination of the methods supported in bolstering the answers to research questions. I downloaded over 3500 articles for the three rapes and murders, spread over a month to understand the overarching themes of the coverage. That helped me to construct the questions for the semi-structured interviews; I could refer back to the coverage and ask my participants questions about the coverage and the impact. After the interviews, I would again check the interview data with the themes of the thematic analysis. The interviews and the themes from the newspaper coverage helped me to decide on the keyword searches on Facebook. The comments from the specific pages on Facebook supported the analysis of the responses to the semi-

structured interviews. This triangulation of the three methods adds to the validity of the findings of the study, making it robust and replicable for other researchers.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the findings from the interviews with feminist activists and journalists.

Chapter 4: And they said....Findings from interviews with feminist activists and journalists

In this chapter, I provide in-depth analysis of my interviews with feminist activists who address issues of rape and sexual assault in India and with journalists about their experiences in covering these issues. I will also discuss what activists said about their successes and challenges of anti-rape activism and what journalists said about newsroom experiences that influence rape and anti-rape activism coverage. Finally, I will discuss how the relationship between journalists and feminist activists influences the anti-rape and sexual assault public agenda.

In this chapter I will explore the following research questions:

***RQ1:** How do feminist activists use social media platforms to build a public and political agenda on rape and sexual harassment/assault in India?*

***RQ2:** How do feminist activists network with journalists to build a public and political agenda on rape and sexual harassment/assault in India?*

***RQ3:** Which media platforms are advantageous (helps in engaging) for feminist activist to build an agenda against issues of rape and sexual assault?*

***RQ4:** What is the impact of social media on the nature of news media coverage on rape and sexual assault according to journalists?*

In the following section, I will briefly discuss the motivations of the activist participants in pursuing feminist activism. I will then discuss my findings from the interviews with feminist activists and journalists. In my study, I have referred to most of the feminist activists by their first names because many did not want to use their last name, since they consider their last as a caste identity. A few feminist activists and journalists did not want to be identified at all, so I

used pseudonyms to protect their identities. To indicate the pseudonyms, I have used an asterisk sign next to the pseudonyms.

Personal is political and networked

In 1970, the celebrated feminist activist Carol Hanisch published an essay, *The Personal is Political*, in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*. Subsequently, *this term* became a rallying cry for feminists in the 1970s, who sought to make the case that women's personal struggles, for reproductive rights, better childcare, and against sexual abuse were in fact political issues (Gupta, 2015). More recently, Gupta (2015) in an article published on the *Open Democracy* website, made the case that of discussing personal struggles in political spaces is still pertinent for feminists.

My interviews with feminist activists, revealed that most of them became involved in activism as a result of personal experiences related to sexual harassment and abuse. I spoke with Usha in Hindi and Anushka* in English; despite their substantially different social backgrounds and geographical locations, they are both victims who became crusaders. They had decided to make their personal experience political. Usha of the Lucknow-based Red Brigade, succinctly explained her motivations to work on anti-rape and sexual assault activism:

I had never thought I would get involved in anti-rape and sexual harassment activism, but circumstances in my personal life created the situation to take activism. My daughter was sexually harassed and abused, I was also sexually abused and I couldn't take it anymore. I was emotionally and physically distraught for over a year. And then I saw in my neighborhood eve-teasing of girls, who would step out of her home to go to school or college. Eve-teasing in my neighborhood is a routine affair. Some of the girls went to the cops to file a complaint, they told the girls to dress up properly or just stay home till the 'menace of eve-teasing had stopped'. But they never stopped the boys, didn't reprimand them, nothing at all. Then, we decided to protest these abuses. Why should we be at the receiving end? Gradually, there were more girls and women in my neighborhood who started protesting sexual harassment and abuses. We got together and formed Red Brigade to voice our opinion, protest and educated each other against harassment.

Anushka* from Delhi had similar reasons for becoming an anti-rape and anti-sexual assault activist:

I was a regular Delhi-based working professional and I was never involved in any kind of activism. But there were incidents of sexual assault and harassment against me. I did everything I could, from filing the First Information Report (F.I.R) with the police to going to activist groups but I got no help. When I went to file my case I was told by one of the policemen that I should go home and sit. For the cops, it's either rape or nothing. There is no classification of sexual harassment for the cops²⁴. I was harassed there and made to write my statement in Hindi. I have never written any official document other than English. I had to spend so much in writing the FIR and I was not even sure if the language was accurate. My case didn't even take off. After my incident I became a victim, but I wanted people to be aware of how things work when someone is sexually assaulted. I left my job and became an activist. If this didn't happen to me personally, I wouldn't have taken up the cudgels to pursue such incidents. To be honest, I no longer vote for political parties as long as they don't have a focused agenda on safety of women and rape.

Other women who made their personal experiences political, include Sutapa and Mamomi, feminist activists from the District of Sundarbans in the state of West Bengal, India and Sonam* and Japleen, from Delhi. Sutapa was sexually abused as a child and then as a teenager. As an adult, she learned that there were other girls and women like her, who had been sexually abused. She created *Amader Prerona*,²⁵ a group to support victims of sexual and domestic violence in her village. Japleen founded a feminist digital platform, *Feminism in India*, which is described on its Facebook page as an “intersectional feminist digital platform to learn, educate & develop a feminist sensibility....” Tired of the repeated sexual harassment in her daily life while using public transport, on the streets of Delhi and other public spaces, Japleen took her

²⁴ The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act was passed in 2013, which provides protection against sexual harassment at workplaces. However, there are issues of accountability and compliance in implementing the act at the workplace and action by law enforcement (Saigal, 2017). Anushka* said there was no compliance of the act in her organization. Even when she went to file a FIR in the police station, they were not clear about the sexual harassment of women at workplace act.

²⁵ Amader prerona is a Bengali phrase, which means our inspiration.

personal experiences to digital spaces. Prior to 2013, Facebook pages dedicated to anti-rape feminist activism were not common in India. Gradually, more and more groups started having a digital presence. Riddhima, the founder of another such group, *Fempositive*, created a similar page like *Feminism in India* on Facebook to create awareness on gender inequality and gender based violence.

A celebrated feminist activist Sampat, who founded the group Gulabi Gang in rural Bundelkhand, which is in the state of Uttar Pradesh in northern India, said that societal discrimination between men and women in the Indian society gives rise to sexual harassment of women:

From my childhood I have seen, boys were given more opportunities and preference over girls. They were fed first, educated first, given money first, and the girls were always waiting for their turn. Girls and women first need to understand this discrimination. Then as they grow older, they are sexually harassed and raped for not toeing the family line. I started my organization here to help women and girls recognize discrimination, assault and abuse and then protest them. Training in self-defense, education and financial independence are very important for girls to fight against sexual harassment and any type of discrimination.

Many miles away in the capital city of Delhi, Dyuti, a young feminist activist, shared a similar personal narrative. A month after the 2012 Delhi gang rape, Dyuti's best friend in college was sexually assaulted in Delhi. When Dyuti's friend filed a police complaint, the politically well-connected perpetrator threatened Dyuti and her friend with an acid attack. Acid attacks are a common tactic in India to scare and threaten women who protest assault or defy patriarchy. According to Acid Survivors Foundation in India (ASFI), in 2015, there were 249 criminal cases of acid attack across India. Arafatul Islam, a journalist and blogger for DeutscheWelle lists the reasons for acid attacks and the increase in recent years in *Why Acid Attacks Are on the Rise in India*:

The victims are attacked over domestic or land disputes, a rejected marriage proposal or spurned sexual advances, where acid is poured on their face to disfigure them. According to the Acid Survivors Foundation in India, there has been a sharp rise in the number of incidents of acid attacks. (DW.com, April 15, 2017)

Dyuti's friend was forced to withdraw her complaint because of political pressure and fear of an acid attack. Dyuti told me: "I had never felt so helpless. We had joined the protests at Jantar Manter against the Delhi gang rape, but couldn't do anything when we were threatened and my friend was victimized." After this incident, Dyuti joined the autonomous women's cell in her college, Miranda House; joining the women's cell in Miranda House was Dyuti's first step in feminist activism. In India, a women's cells have been created in educational institutions, work places and other government institutions to handle complaints related to sexual harassment and to provide a safe working environment for women (UGC guideline, 2013). Since graduating, Dyuti continues to be actively involved in feminist activism.

Across rural and urban areas in India, the 35 feminist activists I spoke with had a personal experience that led them to become feminist activists. Their personal lives became political and networked. By networked, I mean online networks and offline, real life, networks. For feminist activists from rural areas, networking occurs less often on social media and more in person to community networking. Sutapa talked about a chatal (meaning courtyard in Bengali) in her village, where all the women come together and meet in the evening and engage in conversations ranging from their daily life to the abuses they are experiencing. This is a safe space where they network with one another and look for solutions to their problems. Similarly, Sampat said that girls in her organization meet regularly to discuss their issues and try to help

and give support to each other. Their personal experiences moved from personal to political, and networked spaces.

This background of the feminist activists and their engagement with feminist activism scaffolds the discussion of the research questions and findings to the research questions. During interviews with the feminist activists, the following themes were prominent:

Networked feminism

Social media scholars have agreed that the internet and social media platforms give voice to disenfranchised populations.

On the use of media platforms by feminist activists, Adishi of Feminism in India (FII) said:

Our mode of activism is through the internet. Through this platform, we constantly try to ensure that there is enough awareness and dialogue about rape and sexual assault. We are a group of young feminists, non-funded and non-registered, so the social media platforms work well for us. Social media platforms can be tiring and frustrating, but also quite helpful. With the kind of dependence that we have on social media platforms these days, they become good carriers of information. We have an active presence on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and I believe each platform has its own pros and cons. The downside of social media is the enormous amount of online assault directed towards us, which most of the times if possible because of the nature of these platforms. But overall, braving these assaults is worth it (though we really shouldn't get all that just for saying things like rape is not acceptable under any circumstances) at the end of the day when people tell us the kind of awareness and sensitization they've gained because of what we do.

Deya, a feminist activist working for a nonprofit, says the benefit of social media platforms is in reaching out to a larger group of people and getting them involved:

I think the message is reaching a lot more people because many people are on social media more often than following the news. The press quotes others on any issues, while in social media, you can directly get the news. I am creating an online petition on a matter, it's being crowdsourced, so lot of people have their say on what we should use the funding on, how we should create more programs on violence against women.

Dyuti says social media platforms help in amplifying the agenda and information when feminist activists network on similar issues.

There are so many things we don't get to hear or read in the mainstream media like women unable to go out because there are no street lights, or the abuse of Dalits and low caste women. Through Facebook and Twitter, we now get to know more of these issues and eventually share them in other social media networks.

Taruna*, who identifies herself as a gender activist and works to create safe spaces for the LGBTQ community, likewise says:

I am guilty of not following the mainstream media. I have no faith. I feel I get more news and information from online network[s]. It also lets me network with other like-minded feminists and I take the opportunity to engage in civil discussions with others who don't agree with my thoughts. I don't think all this is possible through the mainstream media.

However, rural feminist activists like Mamoni, Anita, Usha, Sampat, Sutapa still network the old-fashioned way by reaching out to their geographic communities by meeting and talking with them. They have been trying to use social media platforms, but their challenges have been many. Usha has been struggling to make sense of the Facebook community standards, given problems with her organization's Facebook page:

Once a girl was being abused and harassed by some boys. We took some pictures and posted them on Facebook but Facebook took them down. We tried again and our page was first blocked then deleted, citing nudity. I don't think we did anything wrong, so now I use Facebook but not so frequently.

In January 2017, Usha sent me an email saying their email had been hacked and they had changed their email address. Later, in May 2017; Usha's organization hired a small public relations organization to manage their Facebook page. Sampat Pal also doesn't use Facebook or Twitter, but she seeks help from her family to email and post videos on Facebook. Sampat is a secondary user of Facebook and other online platforms, in which her family (her son and daughter-in-law) manage the Facebook page of the organization and email on her behalf.

Secondary information use on Facebook or the internet is the use of personal information and

exchange of communication on behalf of the user managed and used by another party, with the knowledge of the primary user (Padyab et. al, 2016)

Similarly, Sutapa agreed that she is learning the tricks of Facebook, but is more comfortable with WhatsApp, because it is a text based application, which is closed and works like text messaging.

Urban and rural feminist activists use social media platforms differently to engage in their activism. Urban feminist activists use Facebook, Twitter and blogs to disseminate information, and engage with the citizen through various online storytelling tools. The urban feminist activists are well equipped to create their own content by producing digital stories, writing blogs, creating cartoons and memes. In contrast, rural feminist activists restrict themselves to using social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook messenger to the network with journalists, and sometime policymakers. Most rural feminist activists I interviewed have a smart phone, but there are issues of network connectivity, creating content and accessing social media platforms like Facebook.

The following segment will discuss how feminist activists disseminate information to the public and engage with them.

Disseminating agendas. The kind of information feminist activists want to share depends on their targeted audience. Some, like *Feminism in India*, want to create a public agenda, so they focus on engaging with the citizens. Adishi, who is associated with *Feminism in India* said, “We try to engage people through our articles, campaigns, posters, discussion group, etc. We believe that sexual assaults are the result of the conditioning that everybody is imbibed with, which furthers rape culture and normalize assaults.”

Gender stereotyping in media and sexual harassment are closely related (Galdi, Maass and Cadinu, 2013; Glick & Fiske, 1995). Engaging on sexual harassment and rape also includes disseminating information on gender sensitivity, says Sanjukta, a feminist activist. She adds:

I keenly follow conversations that happen in Twitter and Facebook on sexual harassment, violence against women and it is surprising to see that even white-collar professionals have archaic views women and their rights. Following the language is a big part for me, where I can plug in my thoughts on rape and sexual harassment. Instead of people coming to you, I share the agenda by becoming part of those conversations, by telling real stories.

Some activists organize workshops and press conferences for journalists, where the victims come and speak. Shyama, who works for a non-profit, frequently organizes such workshops and panels for journalists for her non-profit, where she distributes information on the existing problems, experiences of victims, and how they plan to work on them. Shyama tells me:

“Different tactics work for different messages; for instance, social media platforms work best to spread information about an event or protest. I use our organization’s Twitter handle and Facebook account to share information about workshops and panels. We also have press conferences to discuss agendas or to arrange interviews with victims because the face-to-face interaction humanizes the victim in the eyes of journalists. Press conferences are more effective when we are trying to influence a policy change, since newspapers and news channels reach a large number of people including the policymakers.”

Sutapa finds it easier to use Whatsapp than Facebook to communicate with journalists and push the agenda. She usually sends a message through WhatsApp to the journalists she knows to communicate about the workshops and other activism engagements. Sutapa said,

I am still learning how to use social media platforms effectively. But WhatsApp has been immensely useful for me in connecting with various journalists. They have been instrumental in letting people know of what we are working on, self-defense for women to fight sexual harassment and abuse. Whenever we have Wenlido²⁶ workshops, journalists have featured our activism and workshops and the ways people can get involved in our activism. Newspapers and news media have really helped us in reaching out to victims of violence.

²⁶ Wenlido is a form of martial which trains women to defend themselves against sexual harassment.

Disha, a feminist activist and editorial coordinator of *Khabar Lahariya*²⁷, says it is important to engage with the public and sometimes it is possible to do it through a combination of social media and news media:

There are still social issues like poverty, violence against women, discrimination but social media platforms have helped to create a space to discuss these issues. Our activism is through *Khabar Lahariya*, where we engage in sustained reporting of the various issues women face, including violence against them. This sustained reporting is more detailed unlike issue-based reporting of mainstream media, especially on women's issues. The continuous reporting on the issues, encourages women and the community to talk about issues like violence against women. They feel it's ok to talk about discrimination, harassment and other issues publicly. Since, our platform is online, we share a lot of information through the social media sites. Our reporters get information using social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. We have both a Facebook page and a Twitter page. A few of our reporters are well-trained to share content from the newspaper on our Facebook page. Since the news stories and videos are in Hindi, so we have high engagement with the local readers on our Facebook page. But messages in our Twitter account are almost always in English, because we tweet tagging other international partners as well. Each platform has a different audience.

In the next segment, I will discuss how feminist activists interact with policymakers and law enforcement officials.

Interaction with policymakers and law enforcement officials. Across the board, feminist activists agreed on the challenges in reaching out to policymakers and law enforcement officials. Adishi, on a feminist activist working with *Feminism in India*, says there are many challenges in using the social media platforms for activism and interaction, even when she is not interacting with the policymakers:

My experience so far has been both challenging and enriching. Challenging because people are still insensitive to a large extent towards sexual assault. Being actively involved in sexual assault activism brings you face-to-face with this prevailing insensitivity among a lot of people even today and almost always unhinges you in more ways than one. The only upside of this is the urge to keep working even more vehemently

²⁷ Khabar Lahariya is a digital news website published in Hindi, managed and run by women,⁹³ focusing on violence against women with an intersectional lens of caste, class and religion says to build an agenda.

to do away with this insensitivity and lack of knowledge. And to carry on, despite all this hatred, enriches you at the end of the day.

Sutapa shared a long story about the manner in which policymakers and police work in cases of sexual harassment and rape:

A girl was raped in our village but the police refused to file the FIR against the boy who raped her. The police kept saying that we²⁸ should resolve the matter by taking money from the perpetrator and not go ahead with the police complain, but we refused to budge. So, we sat on a *dharna*²⁹ in front of the police station and refused to move till they filed the FIR, but they kept abusing and threatening us – saying *dekhbo kotokhon boshe thakbi* (which means we will see how long you will continue with the protests). The *dharna* and the harassment continued till late night, then a political leader of the ruling party came at the police station and called us inside. In front of the cops, he abused us and told us to take some money and settle the case. But we refused and continued with our *dharna*. Then, I thought of getting in touch with the highest official of the District, once he was in our village and he had shared his mobile number with our organization. I sent him a message in WhatsApp and he responded immediately. He immediately called the police station after speaking with me and asked the officer on duty to take our FIR, we could lodge the FIR and that was the first step in getting justice for the girl who was raped. When the case made it to the court, it was covered by the media. I think it's important for the people to know that you can't get away by raping or sexually harassing others.

Threatening feminist activists and rape victims is common practice in rural areas in India, irrespective of the state. Kavita, of Khabar Lahariya; Usha of Red Brigade and Sampat of Gulab Gang narrated incidents when they or the rape victims have been threatened by political leaders or the police.

Japleen of Feminism in India says her organization's goal is to build the public awareness and engagement so there has not been any incident of direct conversation with the policymakers. She said:

Our primary agenda is to increase awareness of gender discrimination, rape, sexual violence and harassment, caste-based discrimination and other discrimination through our feminist activism. We use social media platforms such as Facebook to engage with citizens to increase awareness. Twitter is more instantaneous and not really beneficial for

²⁸ "We" here includes Sutapa and other feminist activists from her village.

²⁹ Dharna is a word used in both Hindi and Bengali language. The Cambridge dictionary defines dharna as, "a way of showing your disagreement with something by refusing to leave a place."

engagement but just to share information. To protest or promote any event we use Twitter.

The effectiveness of the media platform for feminist activists depend on the intended audience, the type of message, and the accessibility of digital platforms to feminist activists. Rural feminist activists are also more inclined to use social media platforms such as WhatsApp or messenger to communicate and network with journalists. WhatsApp or messenger works much like text services, which is easier for rural feminist activists to use and they don't have to deal with open social media platforms like Facebook. Facebook pages need constant updates and engagement with the audience, many rural feminist activists do not have Facebook. Even if some of the rural feminist activists have a Facebook account, they are not proficient in social media platforms. There is a lot of dependence on their family members or digital media professionals to deliver their content to the public and the journalists through Facebook. Therefore, it is easier for the rural feminist activists to communicate through the closed platforms like WhatsApp, texting services, are easier to navigate.

Journalists on coverage of rape and sexual harassment

During interviews the journalists discussed the following themes.

Sources. As in other newsrooms, reporters in India, have his or her own sources who give them tips and information about stories or issues. story (Stahlberg, 2013). Journalists depend on various layers of sources when they are covering incidents of rape or sexual assault. Confirming my experience of working in Indian newsrooms, many journalists said during interviews conducted for this study that in cases of rape and molestation the reporter interviews the police officer as a first source for correct information. After interviewing the police officer, journalists usually prefer to interview the survivor but there are challenges in doing so,

“Reaching out to the victim is a herculean task,” said Gyanesh, a journalist working for an English newspaper. The victim or survivor may not want to meet or talk with the journalists.

Somdatta, an education beat journalist for an English newspaper, follows a similar protocol when reporting sexual assaults involving students:

My primary sources in any such incident are the cops. That gives me a clear understanding of what has been reported, who were involved and what action has been taken. Depending on the case, I decide who else could be my sources. But we have to ensure that the identity of the victim is never disclosed in the news reports.

Sayantanee, a reporter for a Bengali newspaper, also said that police and their reports are the first sources in cases of rape and sexual assault. She added, “Since I work in Bihar, the quality of civil society is quite poor and almost non-functional there. This counts out the feminist activists from being our sources.”

Somdatta, Gyanesh, Sayantanee, Tarun, Chinmay and most of the journalists I spoke with agreed that they were skeptical of using feminist activists as their first sources or sometimes even as sources. Chinmay’s quote sums it up for all of them:

Most of the time the feminist activists or any other activists are more interested in media publicity for themselves and their organization. This is not to say all activists are like this but in my experience, the ones that I have encountered are just interested in their own publicity.

Sanjib, a Mumbai based web-journalist, added: “Some of the established activists have made it their profession to be in news, rather than focusing on their work.

Elaborating further, Tarun, a journalist for an English newspaper in Goa gave his reasons for avoiding interaction with activists by saying that:

Some non-profit organizations are known to have financial irregularities, and there is strict hierarchy in the organizations, where the lower level workers or activists are often not taken into consideration when decisions are made. Despite what the non-profits claim, the way they function is not always fair. Recently, there were allegations of financial irregularities against noted human rights activist, Teesta Setalvad. I agree the present central government has long standing issues with Setalvad. But the fact, that

neither she nor her husband could give satisfactory explanation about the irregularities in their account, speak volumes. She is not the first and the last activist to be accused of financial irregularity. But when any activist is accused of wrongdoing, as journalists we take a step backward.

Adwait, a freelance journalist observes from his experience that the younger, internet based activists are successfully disseminating information related to their activism. Adwait adds that most of the time the technology savvy younger activists make good sources because they are prompt and responsive to the queries of the journalists.

Other journalists observe that activists add a lot of value to the coverage of rape and sexual assault. Sagarika Ghosh, a former television journalist and presently a newspaper editor, said:

Right from the Mathura rape case in the 1970³⁰s to the Nirbhaya gang rape case of 2012³¹, feminist activists have played an important role in them. Whenever I have covered any incident of rape or sexual assault, feminist activists have been my sources. I have also hosted them on my channels.

Pratap Somvanshi, an editor with the Hindi edition of *Hindustan Times* said his newspaper include all stakeholders as their sources in their coverage including political leaders and policymakers. Diganta Guha, a freelance journalist said, “Investigating incidences of rape is very difficult, because it involves multiple stakeholders and journalists need to be very sensitive when interviewing them.”

Meanwhile, Sandip Roy, a freelance journalist, said:

³⁰ Mathura, a young tribal girl was raped in 1970 by two policemen in the state of Maharashtra, in western India. The perpetrators were acquitted by the Supreme Court, the highest court in India. However, this judgment led to a huge protest, which forced the government to bring about sweeping changes in the existing rape laws, which shifted the burden of proof from the victim to the perpetrator. For more details, please refer to chapter 1.

³¹ Nirbhaya gang rape case of 2012, is referred to the gang rape and murder of Jyoti Singh Pandey in New Delhi, in December 2012. The incident led to severe protests and led to establishment of the Justice Verma Commission, which brought about changes to the existing rape and sexual harassment laws in India. For more details, please refer to chapter 1.

There is a breach of trust between journalists and activists. It involves a lot of he said and she said and blaming one another. I have seen and met feminist activists who selflessly work for their cause and help the victims. I have also seen other activists who only believe in getting their name out in the media. It's a tough decision for journalists on which activists to rely on and which ones to ignore.

The role of social media in calling out on stereotypes. Scholars (Belair-Gagnon et al, 2013; Phillips et al. 2015; Poell & Rajagopalan, 2015) have repeatedly concentrated on social media platforms and their functions as an information gathering and dissemination tool for incidents of rape and sexual assault. However, most of my interview participants pointed out that social media platforms also monitored journalists on how they framed rape and sexual assault news stories. Previously, journalists would easily get away by casting aspersions on the character of the victim. There was a lot victim blaming, character assassination and narratives centering on questions such as, “what was she doing there?” Since social media platform have been become a popular platform in India, journalists are often called out for their stereotypical framing of the victims. It has also become easier for journalists to ask for information on social media platforms to report on cases.

According to Sayantane, “Social media platforms create pressure, help us to follow up a case till it reaches some logical end.” Citizen engagement on social media sites keeps up the pressure on journalists to keep reporting on some cases of rape and sexual assault. Sandip also agreed with Sayantane, “In the recent past, journalists think twice before casting aspersions on the character of the victim. I definitely think there is less questioning by the media of the victim’s character due to the stress of being called out publicly on social media platform.”

Other journalists like Tarun*, an executive editor of a daily newspaper in Goa, however highlighted the perils of social media platforms in journalism: “As much as social media is helpful, sometimes it becomes a nuisance in rape or sexual assault coverage. There are instances

of circulation of false information, which young journalists circulate without verifying.”

Similarly, Pratap Somvanshi, an editor of a Hindi newspaper in New Delhi, agreed that any lead from social media sources needed to be thoroughly checked:

There have been so many cases in my career that a lead has turned out to be false. The first thing is to check and then see if the victim reported it. Then we try to find the FIR and see what steps have taken place and then report on it. We just don't perform our professional duties as journalists but we also have a social responsibility, which is helping the public.

Caste, class, and geographical location. The intersectional identity of the victim in rape and sexual assault cases is an important factor in media coverage. News frames that are constructed based on rape myths reinforce the misconceptions regarding race and gender (Belknap, 2010). Rapes of women of color are under covered and ignored by the media. Minority women are devalued through the relative invisibility or minimization of their experiences of rape victimization (Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-Macdonald, 2002). In India, women belonging to the minority segments have a similar experience, when their rape is covered by the media. Crime against Dalit women, other lower caste women, lower class women, and women belonging to minority religions have less visibility in the media. Amit*, a senior journalist working for an English newspaper, said:

A molestation or alleged rape occurred in a slum by shanty dwellers will usually not get much coverage or any coverage at all. Editors frequently brush them aside as being not newsworthy. But such an allegation in a high profile or social elite class family will attract huge attention. It is mainly on the profile of the victim and nature of the crime.

Sayantanee agreed with Amit, “The coverage of rape or sexual assault depends on the cruelty of the crime, and the profile of the tormentor or the survivor.”

Crenshaw's (1991) theorization of intersectionality as discussed in chapter 2 explains the claims of Amit* and Sayantanee regarding how journalists should be simultaneously responsive to gender and caste based dimensions of violence and oppression targeting women of low caste

and class. Some scholars such as Anne et. al (2013) and Dey and Orton (2016) have extended Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality to the Indian social intersectional identities of caste and gender. Anne et. al (2013) and Dey and Orton (2016) provide a detailed analysis of sexual assault shows that bodies of women are valued according to their caste, class, and gender; and, as I noted in chapter 2, the scholars distinguished between caste, which refers to hereditary social hierarchical identity of group, and class, which refers to primarily economic group.

In the interview findings, I found the strong influence of geographical location on rape coverage and public engagement with the incident.

Jolly's (2016) report on the role of English media coverage on rape cases in India emphasized the following factors:

(1) A blameless victim: The innocence of the victim, who has been wronged by the perpetrators draws attention of the journalists.

(2) According to Jolly, journalists asserted that if the victim is of the right socio-economic class, it satisfies the PLU (people like us) factor in newsroom. It also implies that the incident is more likely to be covered by the English-language press. 'People like us' refers to middle class and educated people like a majority of the journalists and focusing on the caste-class dynamic.

(3) Stranger rape: Jolly found that the stranger rape caught the imagination of the public, where a virginal, innocent woman enters the world of men and she is eventually raped. In the study Jolly further discusses the caste and class identify of the victim but does not consider the importance of geographical location in the coverage. Geographical location is considered as an important factor in the coverage of rape and sexual assault by the journalists I interviewed.

Gyanesh*, who covered the 2012 Delhi gang rape, remembered receiving a call from his source at the Delhi Police at 4 a.m. on December 17, 2012:

My source said, come as soon as you can this is going to be big. When I asked him why do you say so? He replied I have never seen such a horrendous condition of a rape victim in this kind of a locality in Delhi. When I was interviewing other sources in the police, government and political leaders, they agreed in unison that if this happened a mere 5-6 kilometers towards the outskirts of the city, there wouldn't have been such an uproar.

What makes this case different is the identity of the victim. Jyoti Singh Pandey was an upper caste, but middle-class woman, who was trying to gain a foothold in her profession.

Chinmay, a journalist working for an English newspaper, who is now based in Chennai said:

There are many Nirbhaya-like or even worse incidents that have happened near Chennai, but there is hardly any coverage of that in the national media. The local media sometimes covers if it's not a busy news cycle. But there is hardly the kind of outrage seen in Delhi.

Diganta, a Kolkata based journalist agreed with Chinmay:

I would say, the recent rape and murder of Jisha³², the Dalit woman in Kerala was more brutal than that of Nirbhaya but there was less reporting by the media compared to Nirbhaya's incident. I think a lot depends on how the journalists decide to cover incidents of rape. It's left to the discretion of the media to choose the cases that get more attention.

Gyanesh* vents his frustration during the interview on how editors routinely sideline rape or sexual assault happening in rural areas, "There is no thorough reporting of those incidents, unless they are political in nature like the Kamduni rape of 2013." *The Times of India* (2016) reported on that rape:

The gang rape and murder of the girl took place when she was returning home at Kamduni, about 50km from Kolkata, in North 24-Parganas district after appearing for an examination at her college on June 7, 2013. The second-year BA student was pulled into a farm when she was walking back home along a deserted road after alighting from a bus. She was subsequently gang-raped and murdered. Her mutilated body was found the next morning in a corner of the farm.

The perpetrators were allegedly supporters and party workers of the ruling party in West Bengal.

³² Jisha, a 30-year-old Dalit law student was raped and murdered in Kerala in April, 2016. For more details please read chapter 3. 101

Most reporters are based in urban areas, so there is no denying that there is ease of covering incidents that happen in cities or close to their cities. Subhro, a senior journalist working an English newspaper says:

I agree not all rape incidents get the same coverage but there is no formula for the right coverage of rape incidents. It's like any other news, when any incident happens near the city, whether it's rape, murder or accident, the incident gets both qualitatively and quantitatively more coverage. Proximity to the core readership is an important factor, in the city we tend to react more and give an exhaustive coverage. It's the proximity to the audience or readers, that decides which rape and sexual assault cases get more prominence than the others. And yes, there are certain yardsticks that journalists usually follow like, checking with the sources, checking the police reports and so on.

Rape and sexual harassment as a political issue. The journalists I interviewed endorsed Jolly's (2016) finding that, in terms of volume and space, the coverage of rape and sexual harassment has received more space since 2012 (Jolly, 2016). But they shed light on the fact that rape and sexual harassment are political issues not merely social issues. Gyanesh*, who covered the Delhi gang rape said:

The activism and protests were due to the dissatisfaction of the citizens in the government of the day. The anti-corruption and graft movement of the citizens had fueled the anti-rape protests. You can say it's an offshoot of the previous protests, there was a tremendous anti-incumbency wave against that government. All these spiraled to make it a bigger issue.

The Kamduni gang rape case became big because the perpetrators involved were allegedly party members and workers of the ruling party of the state. The then Chief Minister of West Bengal suspected the rape was the work of the opposition party (Bhadra & Chakraborty, 2013). This quickly became a political issue. Similarly, whatever coverage the Jisha rape case of Kerala got in 2016 was because of the impending assembly elections in the state.

Diganta agreed with Gyanesh:

Prime Minister Modi spoke about Jisha during his campaign in the context of unsafe public spaces for women, but he did not tweet or write in Facebook about her. I doubt

that many people were following the campaign in Kerala. High profile rape cases become politicized, and political parties take the opportunity to discredit one another.

Influence of entertainment celebrities on rape and sexual harassment coverage:

Richa, an experienced journalist working with an English media organization shares her observation of societal framing of rape and sexual assault in the media is largely influenced by the entertainment industry. She says:

Stalking, objectification of women and passive sexual violence are often shown in Bollywood and other Indian movies and the public discourse around them is the typical *chalta hai* attitude that it's just a movie or a television series [*chalta hai* is a commonly used phrase in India which literally means it's ok, let the status quo remain]. The Indian actors make insensitive claims like recently Salman Khan, a famous Indian actor said he was so tired after shooting for a movie that he felt like a rape victim. Such analogy trivializes the incident and the rape victims. But we still go back to entertainment celebrities for their bites when any incident of violence against women happens.

Diganta, another experienced journalist who worked in the entertainment beat in the past, says:

Media has become more responsible in reporting sexual violence including rape. Most entertainment celebrities are very active on Twitter, who love to tweet at the drop of the hat. But whenever there is any incident of violence against women they refrain from tweeting or commenting on social media. So, journalists have to call them to include their comments in the article. There is pressure from the employers to include the comments of celebrities on incidents of violence against women, it ensures that the readers would read the articles which has comments from the celebrities.

Social media platforms, social and geographical location of the incidences, feminist activists as sources, politicization of rape and influence of entertainment celebrities in the coverage of rape, impacts the entire agenda building process. The building of public and political agenda also depends on the amount of exposure any rape incident gets in mainstream media. Hence, it is important to know from journalists the important factors that influence coverage of rape in mainstream media in India.

Influence of the Relationship between Journalists and Feminist Activists on Building Anti-rape and Sexual Assault Agendas

Trust issues. The issue of reciprocal trust and sensitivity is important between journalists and feminist activists. The role and functioning of Indian non-profits are very different from Western countries (Sanghtin writers, 2006). Indian non-profits are hierarchized and have often been discriminatory to the field workers, which has been documented by the Sanghtin writers (a group of subaltern women working as field officers in non-governmental organization) in their diaries. When I was trying to recruit activist participants for the interviews, I faced a similar hierarchical gatekeeping from some of the non-profits. I was refused any contact with the field workers, and only the founder/president wanted to meet. When the office of the founder/president called to reschedule the appointment, I asked if I could go and observe the field workers and how they worked in the meeting. I was not only denied but told categorically, that the meeting was to be only with the founder/president and no one else. And of course, the meeting was never scheduled! Journalists recognize this issue of hierarchy and it creates a biased view of activists.

Similarly, activists also share their concerns of working with journalists. Shama, who works at a non-profit specializing in anti-trafficking and rape pointed out that journalists tend to be insensitive towards the rape and sexual assault:

When they attend workshops and panels, they are not even well prepared to ask the right questions to the victims. We had arranged for a panel some time ago, and most journalists were fumbling to ask questions to the victims. They were more interested in talking about our other initiatives. I hope there is more sensitization on the issue.

On condition of complete anonymity, a gender activist said, “Sometimes it’s just hard to put forward your message. Some journalists are always rushed and they just override your

message with something else. But of course, there are other journalists, who are willing to listen to you, about the activism work we are engaged in.”

Comparing relationship between activists and journalists in urban and rural relationship

Outside the city limits, feminist activists and local journalists share a friendly relationship, which helps in getting more cases of rape and sexual assault covered. Sometimes, the local journalists don the hat of the activist. Kavita, a journalist of a woman run community newspaper and website, *Khabar Lahariya*, in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh says,

There are lot of times when after the FIR is lodged no action is being taken by the police. Then the aggrieved party reaches out to me and asks me to follow up. I reach out to the higher officials DIG (Deputy Inspector General of Police) or SP (Superintendent of Police) and ask for their byte on the pending issue, then the police officials start investigating the matter.

Usha, a feminist activist and founder of Red Brigade, an anti-rape and sexual harassment organization in the city of Lucknow in the state of Uttar Pradesh, in Northern India, has had similar experiences:

There are times when local journalists call us to give information on any incident. They will tell us that an incident has happened at this place, you should go and do something. Our journalist supporter help us in every possible way (in Hindi Usha said, “*Humare patrakar samarthak bahut sahayog karte hain.*”)

Sutapa and Sampat shared similar experiences of receiving support from local journalists, when the journalists not only report on the incident, but the journalists also encourage the feminist activists to speak with journalists from other organizations. Sutapa, Sampat, and Usha agreed that the local journalists know a lot of senior officials and sometimes they help the feminist activists to connect with the senior officials for redress for victims.

Feminist activists agreed that there is more reporting on rape and sexual assault now as compared to some years ago because there is electronic and online media. Now, people can see the news all through the day and get information about various incidences.

Role of social media. Social media is important to the relationship between journalists and activists by connecting them and allowing them to interact on issues of sexual abuse and harassment. But as Smith, et al. (2015) point out, in the context of Twitter, those interactions and conversations lack insight and depth. Twitter provides a deluge of information, but it cannot sustain the conversation, it can also Twitter can act as a rather specific ‘newswire’ for people who follow specific hashtags.

Kavita said Facebook has helped her in reporting incidents of sexual violence. She reads and writes only in Devnagri script of Hindi. The availability of the script on Facebook and WhatsApp has had a profound impact on her work. Kavita says:

When people read the kind of reporting I do, they give me information about other incidents and ask me to report on that. I get messages on Facebook from the people of neighboring villages in our district, requesting me to report on rape and sexual harassment incidents. Police usually doesn’t register these incidents because they happen to women or girls, who are not well-equipped to go through the difficult process of filing police complaint. Their neighbors or friends send me Facebook messages, urging me to cover the incidents. This would not have been possible if I didn’t have Facebook. I use Whatsapp to get in touch with officials for interviews and other sources. I also get photographs and videos from sources.

Social media platforms have made a big difference in the way newsrooms and activists work (Lasorsa, et al. 2011), but the in some cases the nature of reporting has not changed much in cases of rape and sexual assault because of the inherent social bias (Jolly, 2016). In her scholarly article, Jolly explains the social biases of class, caste, and religion in journalists when they are reporting on rape. Adding to that, the economical nature of using Whatsapp has been beneficial to the rural feminist activists. The fact that Indian newsrooms are not very diverse

(Balasubramaniam, 2011) only adds to the inherent biases in reporting, since most journalists are upper-caste Hindu males.

The only noticeable difference is that with the advent of online news and news channels that are in search of breaking news every minute, the news of such cases is getting more prominence (Moon & Hadley, 2014). There is no denying that social networking sites influence the way journalists and activists communicate and disseminate news since many journalists now want a reaction or statement through social media. This was reiterated by Shayon*, who is a journalist with a leading English newspaper in India. Other journalists also agreed with Shayon* like, Subhro Niyogi, a journalist from Kolkata who said:

Usually, journalists and activists don't network on social media websites. But it has happened in the past when an incident of rape or sexual violence happens; survivors or their well-wishers have used social media platforms to garner support. We do look at these platforms to get reactions from the people. But again, I am not sure if the NGOs (non-governmental organizations) do much networking through social media sites. Of course, they use Whatsapp, but for me it's like texting with slightly better features.

Discussion

Through my conversations with the feminist activists and the journalists, I found that their role has evolved after the infamous gang rape and murder of Jyoti Singh Pandey in New Delhi in 2012. The findings also answered the following research questions:

RQ1: How do feminist activists use social media platforms to build the public and political agenda on rape and sexual harassment/assault in India?

Feminist activists agreed that they use Facebook to engage with the citizens but Twitter to promote any event or spread any quick message. Urban feminist activists use Twitter to spread and share information about any event, and Facebook for engagement with the public. At the same time, it would be naive to assume that online participatory media are always democratic spaces. Meijias (2013) shows that social media platforms can also deepen socio-economic

inequalities by commodifying social labor, and privatizing social spaces and surveillance. Rural feminist activists have come across gatekeeping and barriers while trying to use social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Most of them prefer using WhatsApp and still try to use Facebook to build agenda and network with journalists.

***RQ2:** How do feminist activists network with journalists to build public and political agenda on rape and sexual harassment/assault in India?*

Russell (2016) in her book writes about the collaboration between journalists and activists in activism; journalists are getting involved in advocacy, and activist voices in mass media are becoming stronger. Russell (2016) identifies the influence of digital tools in creating a collaborative relationship between journalists and activists. The interview conversations with the journalists and the activists pointed to a similar pattern, as indicated by Russell.

Journalists have a stronger relationship with rural feminist activists, where they are involved in collaboration with the rural feminist activists, often giving them information about incidents, sharing information from senior law enforcement officials. As compared to urban feminist activists, the rural feminist activists have a collegial relationship with the journalists. In such situation, the urban feminist activists use social media platforms to bypass the gatekeeping of the mainstream media and the journalists. They try to build an agenda through the social media platforms, by sharing memes, blogs and hashtags on Facebook and Twitter. The rural feminist activists experience gatekeeping in the social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter because of the challenges arising from digital access and digital literacy. Some of the rural feminist activists are more comfortable speaking with their audiences and journalists than creating content for social media platforms. Sometimes, they need professional assistance in maintaining Facebook pages, because they want to document their activism and the various

efforts they are taking for their activism. Reaching their audience is easier for them when they do marches or meetings or go door to door. In India, specifically rural India, the public still believes in what the mainstream media prints or shows in the news channel or even what they hear on radio.

RQ3: Which media platforms are advantageous for feminist activist to build an agenda against issues of rape and sexual assault?

Ironically, both forms of media -- social media platforms and mainstream media could be involved in gatekeeping to control dissemination of information and engagement by feminist activists. I have already identified in the second chapter on literature review that examples from western democracies focusing primarily on social media sites as platforms to bypass gatekeeping is not applicable to India, because of its digital divide and social, cultural, linguistic, economic diversity. To bypass gatekeeping by the mainstream media, journalists, social media platforms and the algorithms practiced by the social media platforms; feminist activists need to focus simultaneously on both platforms to engage with the public.

Journalists on the other hand, find it hard to completely ignore any issue that is ‘trending’ or going ‘viral’ on social media platforms. Viral and trending topics on social media sites are equally newsworthy now, due to the visibility of the issues. Journalists can be instrumental in building agenda, on one hand they cannot ignore the viral and trending topics on social media sites; on the other hand, they cover initiatives by rural feminist activists.

RQ4: What is the impact of social media on the nature of news media coverage on rape and sexual assault according to journalists?

Journalists have agreed that social media platforms have positively and negatively influenced rape and sexual assault coverage in mainstream news media in India. Journalists are

mindful of engaging in victim-blaming in their coverage, as they frequently get called out on social media platforms by activists and citizens. Journalists also feel the need to include citizen voices through the social media platforms in their coverage on rape and sexual assault. Participating journalists recognized that social media platforms also influence coverage negatively, when some journalists are quick to submit their reports based on information from social media platforms, without verifying the claims or information.

In this chapter, I demonstrated how journalists and feminist activists interact, which influences the public agenda to build awareness of rape and sexual assault. Some previous research on the feminist movement in India has focused on urban or semi-urban feminist activists. The inclusion of the rural feminist activists in this study was enlightening for me as a researcher. Not only were they more forthcoming, but they gave a perspective different to the popularly shared version of feminist activism. It is a significant finding which challenges the assumptions in the anti-rape feminist movement in India, of how the feminist activists network and build agenda with limited to no-sources and other challenges in the rural areas.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the findings of the thematic analysis of news coverage of three rapes and Facebook engagement of the same cases.

Chapter 5: What the media says (Thematic and Social Media Analysis)

In this chapter, I will start by discussing the existing laws on rape and sexual assault; and then I will analyze the themes present in the news articles about three rapes –those of Pratibha Murthy (2005); Jyoti Singh Pandey (2012) and Jisha (2016). Finally, I will analyze the public comments on feminist Facebook group of Jyoti Singh Pandey and Jisha’s rape and murder.

In this chapter I will explore the following research questions:

***RQ 5:** What are the patterns of mainstream media coverage of rape?*

***RQ 6:** How did the feminist activist groups use Facebook to build public agenda on rapes of Jyoti Singh Pandey and Jisha?*

I decided to compare the media coverage of Pratibha Murthy’s, Jyoti Singh Pandey’s and Jisha’s rape and murder for the following reasons:

1. The rapes and murders provided a timeline for me to identify changes in reporting of rape incidents after social media platforms became ubiquitous in newsrooms and publication communication.
2. The 2012 gang rape incident is often referred to as the watershed moment in feminist activism in India by scholars and journalists. I wanted to analyze the response to the 2016 rape case and understand if there had been a change of rape coverage or if the coverage of the 2012 gang rape case was an outlier. There were many similarities between the 2012 and 2016 gang rape cases, but a comparison of mainstream media coverage would indicate if the framing of rape and sexual assault had really changed and it was consistent in similarly brutal incidents.
3. Finally, in all the three cases the women were brutally raped and killed. When a rape victim survives, the media coverage is different as compared to when the victim is

murdered. I selected comparable incidents of rape and murder to assess the changes in the framing of rape and murder in mainstream coverage. Irrespective of the fact if rapes result in death, it is important to provide a consistent coverage of rape.

Journalists in India are required to follow certain laws when they report on rape and sexual assault. During the interviews, many journalists pointed out that despite their best intentions not to victimize rape victims, the Indian legal structure and laws make coverage rape complicated. The complications arise from the misunderstandings of the journalists, when and how they should identify the victims. Even when the victims or their family are willing to identify themselves, the newsrooms refrain from recognizing the victims.

I start by discussing an important legal act of the Indian Penal Code, which is steadfastly followed by journalists when they are reporting on rape and sexual assault. According to the Central Government Act, Section 228A, of the Indian Penal Code, disclosing the identity of the victim in any publication is punishable by imprisonment and monetary fine (Saikia, 2013). However, if the victim or, upon the death of the victim, the next of kin gives a written statement to the officer in charge agreeing to be identified by the media, the news outlets may identify the victim. Some of the interview participants like journalists Subhro, and Amit agreed that the anonymity leads to further victimization of the rape victim. They do appreciate the logic behind the law, that is to protect the rape victim from being harassed but it also prevents journalists from disclosing important facts in their news reports such as if the victim was stalked by a neighbor or if the victim had filed a complaint previously in a local police precinct. These discussions would not be possible without identifying the victim in some way or the other, such as the neighborhood in which she lived. It also conveniently dehumanizes the victim if there is no name.

I am discussing this issue upfront because of the inconsistency in identifying and disclosing the identities of the victims in the three rape cases in the study. Pratibha Murthy Srikanth and Jisha were identified by the press and their images were circulated through the media. I do not know, if Pratibha Murthy Srikanth's family gave permission to the media to publicly identify her in media reports. Jisha's last name is unknown, in the media coverage she was identified as Jisha. But I do know, that, in Jyoti Singh Pandey's coverage, she was not identified by the press until her parents came forward to disclose her identity, and her image has also not been made public on any media platform till date. In contrast, Jisha was not given any alias by the media; her real name and image was widely circulated by the media. There could be two reasons for this:

1. Jisha, a *Dalit* woman is the bottom of the caste hierarchy and hence she is not given the same courtesy as upper caste victims (Basu, 2016)
2. Initially, it was believed by the police that Jisha was murdered and assaulted and not raped. In such cases, the law to withhold identify is not applicable (Mantri, 2016).

The inconsistency in coverage of the rapes and the erratic quantity and quality of coverage given to the cases negatively impacts in the agenda building process. In the next segment, I will provide a background of the three rape incidences and why I decided to choose them over other incidences.

Background

Pratibha Murthy, a 28-year old married woman working at the business processing office (BPO) of Hewlett Packard in Bangalore, India, was raped and murdered on December 24, 2005, in Bangalore, by her driver. Murthy belonged to an upper middle-class family. Murthy's rape and murder prompted media discussions about the safety of working women in big cities, the

change in work culture due to the IT boom in India, and the responsibility of multinational companies (MNCs) in ensuring the safety of their employees. According to news reports and police investigations, Murthy and another female employee of the organization had previously complained about the driver's harassment and misbehavior, but the company, which had contract drivers on their roster, did not act to remove the driver from duty. Although another driver was scheduled to pick her up, the information did not reach Murthy. She was reported missing after she left home for her night shift. When she did not turn up at her workplace, a missing person report was filed, and after some days, her body was recovered. Police investigations concluded that she had been raped and murdered. The newspaper coverage emphasized on Murthy's family and background and the safety of the call centers (Hegde, 2011).³³ The rape and murder soon became more than a crime against Murthy; the rape became a crime against her family, as the family had not only lost a member but also their honor (NDTV, 2010; Hegde, 2011). After Murthy's rape and murder, the government forced the multinational organizations and call centers to overhaul organizational policies regarding the safety and security of women (Nandi, 2012)

Jyoti Singh Pandey was gang raped and murdered on December 16, 2012, in Delhi. This case is often referred to as the watershed moment in feminist activism because the young paramedic student was gang-raped and brutalized by four men on a moving bus. Pandey had gone to watch a movie with a male friend Awindra Pandey. After the movie, Jyoti and her friend were not able to arrange suitable public transport, "After the film, they took a rickshaw but the driver refused to take them the full distance and dropped them in the middle of nowhere."

³³ Bangalore was the hub for IT companies in India. Men and women were equally employed in the profession, the culture was changing gradually because of the night shifts that the IT professionals were required to work.

(Bukhari, 2013) After waiting on isolated road, a white empty bus, stopped in front of Jyoti and Awindra and asked where they were headed to. Once, they got on, they realized that they were the only passengers. After 15 to 20 minutes of riding, the three driver's assistants started harassing Jyoti and her friend. It started as a verbal attack and harassment, but quickly escalated to threats and sexual harassment. When Jyoti and her friend protested, they were severely beaten. Jyoti was then raped by the assistants and the driver, when the other assistants took turn driving the bus. Jyoti put up a fight against her perpetrators; in retaliation, one of them shoved a rod through her vagina.

Around 9 p.m., Pandey and her friend were thrown from the moving bus on a secluded road. Some people passing by noticed them and then took them to the hospital. There were brief media reports on Pandey's rape the following day. As more information came to light, protests grew across the country. As per the Indian law, the media cannot identify a rape victim, so some Indian news publications gave changed names to the victim, such as Nirbhaya and Damini. One publication named Pandey, as Nirbhaya, which means the fearless. The other publication gave her the name Damini, which is the name of the famous movie characters from the 1990s. The character Damini fought for the rights of a rape and murder victim. Nirbhaya became the most famous of the name changes, though her parents repeatedly said they were not ashamed to identify their daughter with her name. There were widespread protests in Delhi, where the crime took place, and in multiple places across the country. During the protests, chaos broke out between the police and the protestors. As Pandey's condition worsened, the police finally caught up with the perpetrators, and Jyoti was moved from Delhi to Singapore for her medical treatment by the government. Journalists followed Jyoti and her family to Singapore. Finally, on December 29th, Pandey succumbed to her injuries. But before dying, she identified her perpetrators and

gave a detailed statement to the police on the incident and how she was raped and violently assaulted³⁴. This created a huge movement and a spike in social media engagement (Ahmed, Jaidka, & Cho, 2017).

NDTV, published the following in their website after the Pandey's death:
The Nirbhaya case had drawn visceral response from the nation. Protests and candlelight marches held across all metros. The biggest of these were held in Delhi, where thousands of students braved tear gas shells and water cannons at the India Gate in bitter winter.

After Jyoti Singh Pandey died worldwide protests and uproar erupted. Protests against Pandey's rape and murder spilled over onto social media sites, #Nirbhaya was a top trending hashtag on Twitter (Biswas, 2016). There were numerous Facebook pages created on the theme of justice for Nirbhaya, demanding safety for women on public transport, in public spaces, and castration of rapists. Meanwhile, the perpetrators were arrested and taken into police custody. Academics (Durham, 2015; Belair, 2014; Rao, 2013) and journalists have repeatedly emphasized on the narrative that social media platforms made a huge difference in making this a watershed moment in rape coverage and social justice. As an outcome, the government proposed to establish rape crisis centers and constituted the Justice Verma commission. According to the PRS Legislative report, The Justice Verma commission is:

A three-member Committee headed by Justice J.S. Verma, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, was constituted to recommend amendments to the Criminal Law so as to provide for quicker trial and enhanced punishment for criminals accused of committing sexual assault against women. The other members on the Committee were Justice Leila Seth, former judge of the High Court and Gopal Subramaniam, former Solicitor General of India (PRS, 2017).

³⁴ In 2016, the government allocated 200 crore rupees (which is equivalent to \$310,000 USD)¹¹⁶ to a fund that was set up in memory of Jyoti Singh Pandey. The Nirbhaya fund, as it is known, supports government initiatives to protect women and children from sexual crimes and provides compensation for survivors.

Subsequently, the Committee submitted its report on January 23, 2013. It made recommendations on laws related to rape, sexual harassment, trafficking, child sexual abuse, medical examination of victims, police, electoral and educational reforms; which I have discussed in the introductory chapter.

In the third case, Jisha³⁵, a 30-year-old Dalit law student, was killed and murdered in Kerala by her stalker on April 28, 2016 in Perumbavoor (Kerala). Both in the mainstream media and social media, parallels were quickly drawn to the rape and murder of Jyoti Singh Pandey. The media coverage discussed in detail the gory details of Jisha's murder (such as that she was stabbed over 30 times and her intestines were removed). The initial narrative was like Pandey's rape and murder coverage, but the outrage in Jisha's rape and murder was significantly less as compared to Pandey's rape and murder. There were no candle light vigils, nor swift action against the perpetrator. And within a few weeks, the conversation and engagement fizzled. The Twitter hashtag was also present only for a couple of days. Here a 30-year-old lower caste (Dalit) woman was brutally raped and murdered, but there was less mass outrage against Jisha's rape and murder. Geetika Mantri, in her May 4, 2016, article in *The News Minute* noted that some media coverage indicated that the brutality in this case was more than the Delhi gang rape case, but it failed to get similar attention from the media or the policymakers.

In the three cases, media practitioners and scholars have widely accepted that Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder is considered a watershed moment because of the changes in rape and sexual harassment laws in India, much like the 1970 Mathura rape case³⁶. Changes were made in

³⁵ Jisha has been referred to by her first name in the media coverage. There is no reference to her last name.

³⁶ Mathura, a young tribal girl was raped in 1970 by two policemen in the state of Maharashtra, in western India. The perpetrators were acquitted by the Supreme Court, the highest court in India. However, this judgment led to a huge protest, which forced the government to bring

Indian rape law on the recommendation of the Justice Verma Commission such as allowing the victims to file online FIR; setting up rape crisis centers; ensuring that cops help the victims irrespective of their jurisdiction and more. The central government created the Criminal Law (Amendment Act) of 2013 to make sexual assaults and rape laws robust and sensitive to the victim. Section 53A in the Indian evidence act was modified, which made previous sexual experience and relationships of the victim irrelevant in a case of sexual assault and rape, when establishing consent. The 2013 law also prohibited questioning the victim regarding past sexual relations and experience during witness examination in court. In May of 2013, the Supreme Court of India banned the two-finger test, also known the virginity test for a rape victim, citing that it violates the privacy of the victims. The two-finger test is conducted on rape survivors by inserting two-fingers in the vagina of the women to check her virginity. All these changes came into the legal system after the rape and murder of Jyoti Singh Pandey. There have been many incidents of rape and murder after Jyoti Singh Pandey's, but none have garnered similar public outrage, or media sympathy.

Thematic Analysis

I analyzed news coverage of the three episodes of rape mentioned above. The three cases I chose occurred in 2005, 2012, and 2016. I was specifically interested to see if there had been any changes to the framing of the articles after social media platforms were introduced in Indian newsrooms around 2009-10. In the previous chapter, journalist interviewees acknowledged that social media platforms influence the framing of the rape coverage. To compare the

About sweeping changes in the existing rape laws, which shifted the burden of proof from the victim to the perpetrator. For more details, please refer to chapter 1.

conversations, I selected cases from different time-frames, to assess if social media platforms are the only factors for outrage or the other factors in play.

The media coverage of Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder in 2012 and Jisha's rape and murder in 2016 compared the details of the two rapes and focused on the similarity in the attacks such as damaging internal organs and the eventual death of the victims.

I reviewed 550 articles about the three rape and murder cases. The themes of news values; location; caste and class; politicizing rape; public agenda; mention of social media platforms; mention of activists; and family honor/shame were presented in the coverage of Murthy, Jyoti, and Jisha's rape and murder cases.

Recent studies of the values in Indian newsrooms show that these values dictate the framing of certain issues, specifically, issues of sexual violence (Fadnis, 2017; Rao, 2013; Joseph, 2008). Joseph (2008) posited that Indian journalists were unaware of the pre-existing biases, as the social and political context shaped the reporting on violence against women. Joseph (2008) indicated that ethics and commodification of news ("What sells as news") influences the news discourses on rape. I looked for the following news values based on Harcup & O'Neil's (2016, p. 3) study of news values. I decided to select only the following three news values from their list of ten news values, which I thought are relevant to this study. News values are known to influence coverage of rape in mainstream media (Boyle, 2012) and the following news values are the most relevant:

1. The power elite: This news value includes stories about influential individuals, organizations and institutions, who have the capacity and the ability to control the public agenda politically, economically and socially.

2. Celebrity and entertainment: This news value includes stories about famous personalities and show business. “Stories concerning sex, show business, human interest, animals, an unfolding drama, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, entertaining photographs or witty headlines.” (Harcup & O’Neil, 2016, p. 3)
3. Newspaper agenda: Finally, this news value includes stories that expand the agenda of the media organization and benefits the organization directly by publicizing the contribution of the organization in creating a political and public agenda.

I looked for these values in the articles, given that rape coverage is influenced by news values (Boyle, 2012). I counted the number of times I found these values in the articles and then calculated the percentage with respect to the total number of articles in each case; for instance the number of times the power elites and celebrities were referred to the articles and the number of times the newspaper agenda or impact was highlighted. The popular frame of “celebrities taking to social media to express discontent” (Harcup & O’Neil, 2016; pp. 3 and 5) was specifically noticeable in coverage of Jyoti Singh Pandey’s rape and murder: some news articles concentrated on entertainment celebrities who expressed their outrage on social media sites. For instance, in a story titled, *Bollywood Mourns Delhi Gang Rape Victim, Demands Justice, Queen film unit protests against Delhi gang rape*, was about the social media messages of leading Bollywood celebrities in India. The focus in these articles were on the celebrities and the fact that they participated in street marches but there was negligible discussion in these articles on how the celebrities perceived any changes to public safety and what how they wanted the changes to be incorporated. Following is an example of the focus: “Hundreds of actors, models, television personalities, socialites, media planners and students took out a symbolic

protest... the models and actors, many of them from Sandalwood³⁷, shouted slogans like 'Once a rapist, always a rapist', 'Do or die, please stop her cry' and 'Women should be respected and not treated as object of pleasure'" (*sic*) (Times News Network, 2012a). Around 10% of 550 articles on the coverage of the Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape highlighted the involvement of the celebrities.

Celebrity sound-bites were also focused by the press, in the form of highlighted descriptions of quotes from actors and other celebrities on the issue of safety of women. This could be an opportunity to include bites from feminist activists and other grass-root workers, who diligently work to build anti-rape agenda in the articles. The readers are likely to read the articles which give prominence to celebrities; including the work of feminist activists will give them a platform. This was also seen in the Standing Rock protests, in which Shailene Woodley's arrest and involvement in the protests got more press than the actual protests and the grass-root activists (Tuiskula, 2016). Tufekci (2013) in a study on celebrity activism found that media coverage always gives more attention to celebrity voices, drowning the causes and grassroots voices of the movement. The following comment from actor, Swetha Sanjeevulu was highlighted in the news article on Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder:

Law and government are for the people. Not otherwise. Therefore, most severe action needs to be taken against the rapists and molesters. They should not be merely imprisoned for cruelty meted out to women in a country where goddesses are worshipped. These depraved persons should be hanged for their unforgivable crimes (Times News Network, 2012a)

The actor's bite did not suggest any new course of action against perpetrators of rape and sexual assault or initiative to create safe spaces for women. Instead a bite from a feminist

³⁷ The film industry of the Indian state of Karnataka is popularly known as Sandalwood (Agrawal, 2016)

activist on the initiatives and existing challenges to implement the initiative would give an idea to the public.

Even the coverage on the protests against rape and rape laws was focused on the celebrities. For instance, in the following paragraph, the focus is on how the celebrities made their presence felt in the protests:

Film and theatre personalities made their presence felt in a silent rally of about 1,200 people, led by actor Shabana Azmi, from Juhu beach to the Kaifi Azmi Park on Saturday evening. "This ghastly incident has again highlighted the fact women are not safe in the country anymore. We need firm steps to ensure safety of our women and other citizens," said Azmi, adding even though the fight for justice will be a 'long struggle', one must not forget this episode" (TIMES NEWS NETWORK, 2012b).

The story went on to mention at least 20 famous Indian celebrities who had attended the rally and shown a placard demanding safety for women, reading: "In a democracy, the only way to raise your voice is by bringing the protest on to the streets. People are out in big numbers now across the country fighting for similar concerns and hopefully, the government will act and stop this apathy (Times News Network, 2012b).

As much as film and theater personalities help generate interest in readers for particular news stories, the exclusive focus on celebrity personalities also tends to take away the focus from the protest marches initiated by the citizens and the activists. This could be an opportunity to give coverage to activists along with the celebrities to reach out to the audience.

Even at the press conferences for the promotion of a movie, there were references to Jyoti Singh Pandey's case. One such reference to Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder is identified in the article, Delhi gang-rape: Salman Khan wants rapists to be killed, "Salman said, during a press conference to promote his upcoming movie, Dabangg 2, 'If not death they should be sentenced for life so that they learn a lesson. Rapists are beaten up in jails also" (Times News Network, 2012). Celebrities in India selectively weigh in on issues ranging from gender violence to

communal violence, but often involvement of celebrities is tied to the promotion of their upcoming movie releases.

Other than entertainment celebrities, the media prominently covered the political leaders and their opinion on the Pandey's rape and murder. For instance, in this story published in *The Times of India*, (2012c), the focus was on lawmakers and what they thought could be done to combat sexual violence and issues of rape, "Women members in both Houses said that the "barbaric" incidents of rape turned a woman into a living corpse and therefore there was need to give death penalty to perpetrators."

BSP chief Mayawati said law should be amended to ensure stronger action in such cases. "Nothing will happen by only arresting the perpetrators. Give them stringent punishment." (Times News Network, 2012c)

The two leading newspapers of India --- *The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times* gave two different name changes to Jyoti Singh Pandey after her rape. Both newspapers focused on their name change of Pandey and coverage of the incident and the impact of the name change. This is evident from the following selections:

"The Times of India (TOI) has symbolically named the victim." (Times News Network Mumbai, 2012d)

"Sunday witnessed a surge of support for the courageous 23-year-old Delhi gang rape victim, christened Nirbhaya by TOI" (Times News Network Bangalore, 2012e)

"Nirbhaya, as TOI has symbolically named the victim, has expressed through muffled speech and hand gestures that she wants to take the fight back to the men who raped her" (Ghosh, 2012)

A similar stance was followed by *Hindustan Times*, in which the newspaper gave a completely different symbolic name *Damini* to Jyoti Singh Pandey. *Damini* was also the name of

a famous Bollywood movie and its central character. The movie, released in the 1990s, famous for its protagonist fighting against rape. Following is an example:

The death of 23-year old paramedic student Damini in the wee hours of Saturday has united the political parties across the state. All major political outfits expressed the need to frame stringent laws to deal with such incidents. But Damini's death changed the course of the event with most leaders harping on the need to strongly punish the accused (Hindustan Times, 2012a)

After Jyoti Singh Pandey's death, her parents publicly disclosed her name in an interview to the British tabloid *Daily Mirror* and said, "We want the world to know her real name. My daughter didn't do anything wrong, she died while protecting herself. I am proud of her. Revealing her name will give courage to other women who have survived these attacks. They will find strength from my daughter" (Farhoud & Andrabi, 2013). Despite this disclosure, the Indian journalists continued to call her Nirbhaya, Damini, India's Braveheart, Amanat and countless other names. Sneha Rajaram in an editorial, "*Why do we continue to call her Nirbhaya? What's wrong with saying Jyoti Singh Pandey?*" published on December 18, 2015 in *Firstpost*, a news website, writes about Nirbhaya/Damini and the other names becoming a brand for the news organizations. She questions if framing the rape victim as invincible, fearless and making a Goddess out of her, the only way to respect her.

Even now, four years after Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder, the news media continues to refer to her as Nirbhaya, which I believe like Rajaram is an attempt to maintain the brand created by the newspaper.

The news values related to the elite, celebrity and entertainment and newspaper agenda were present in the coverage of Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder.

In contrast, there were no quotes from entertainment celebrities in Pratibha Murthy's rape and murder coverage, in 2005. Of course, getting quotes from entertainment celebrities have

become much easier than before, because they tweet about and write Facebook posts on incidents that get more coverage by the mainstream media. It was not surprising to notice increase in quotes from entertainment celebrities after Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder in 2012. However, the entertainment celebrities did not engage on social media platforms similarly after Jisha's rape and murder; neither I did find comments from them quoted by conventional journalists. There was no social media outrage by the celebrities after Jisha's rape and murder, despite the increase the technological enhancements made in social media sites.

However, there was presence of the other news value of power elite in Jisha's rape and murder, like focusing on the sound-bites of important people like the Prime Minister or other political leaders, state and union ministers or career bureaucrats. Perhaps celebrities were not engaging in the discourse in the time-frame I focused on. But, overall there was less outrage by both the political and social elite of the country. At least, one newspaper article called out the hypocrisy of inconsistent public outrage on the various rape cases:

Take, for example, the rape and murder of a 30-year-old Dalit woman at Perumbavoor in Kerala on April 28. The brutality of the incident is a chilling reminder of the 2012 gang rape case in Delhi but the public reaction to it has been nothing like what we saw in Delhi (Hindustan Times, 2016a)

Similarly, a *Hindustan Times* editorial columnist compared the news values in both Jisha and Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder:

We must care about the rape and death of the Kerala Dalit law student because of the crime itself, not because it is gory and shocks us. We must stop comparing it to the Delhi gang rape because the similarities exist in their horrific death and not in the lives lead. We must acknowledge that our motivation at the comparison is to drag the Kerala woman's life into a setting that we are comfortable in - urban, upper caste - and not confront the realities of caste violence across India. (Jyoti, 2016)

But such discussions were very limited in the coverage. Except calling out the bias of selective outrage of the public, mainstream media and social media in a couple of columns, the

majority of the news coverage did not even identify the existence of this selective outrage in the power-elite.

Location Where an incident occurred was a recurrent theme, and played an important role in how the newspapers defined the crime and the importance attached to it. I looked for specific references to the location of the incidents; the importance of the location in the interviews and quotes from citizens, elites and celebrities; and finally, how the location was framed by the journalists. In Murthy's case, an article jointly published in *The Times of India* and Economic Times emphasized on the safety measures in the metropolitan cities of India,

Something like this can happen anywhere in India, but I don't think it's a big threat to us in Mumbai. It is definitely no issue for us but it's the higher-ups who have to worry. ...When a car enters the Hi-Tech city (Hyderabad's IT hub), there are security personnel at the entrance that check each and every car. What's more, when we enter the Nipuna building, we are checked with metal detectors and are frisked as well. Most employees in Mumbai feel that the attacks in Bangalore are of no consequence (Vyas, 2005)

There was a repeated focus on big cities and the security and infrastructure available in those cities, as well as how the rest of India is different from the major cities. When Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder were reported on, the focus was on the capital city, framed as the nation's capital.

"It is our complacency that has led to this situation. Delhi is the rape capital because such crimes are normalized after a few days. Criminals get away and Delhiites go back to being complacent." (Nandi, 2012)

Similarly, the following coverage justified calling Delhi the rape capital:

Delhi has earned the odium of the "rape capital" with an incidence of 572 rape cases in 2011. But in the same year, it is Madhya Pradesh that reported the highest number of cases for rape (3,406), molestation (6,665) and importation of girls (45) accounting for 14.1%, 15.5% and 56.3% of the respective national totals (Mitta, 2012)

Some articles focused on the status of the city being a rape capital, as in this article from xyz paper:

In a new low for a city already notorious as India's rape capital, a 23-year-old physiotherapy student was left battling for her life after being brutally beaten up and raped by at least five drunken men in a private bus which was audaciously driven around south Delhi localities on Sunday night even as the crime was being committed inside (Chauhan, Ghosh & Shekhar, 2012)

Then there were also insinuations that while such an incident might occur in a village or rural area, it was unacceptable in the power corridor New Delhi. As one article put it, “The incident continued for 90 minutes not in a village or some jungle but in south Delhi....” (The Times of India, 2012f) Similarly, policymakers were concerned with only the safety of women in the capital rather than any others in the country. “Meanwhile, home minister Sushil Kumar Shinde said in Parliament that a special committee, headed by home secretary, Parliament shocked over Delhi gang rape, seeks death penalty has been constituted to look into the safety of women in Delhi.” (The Times of India, 2012g)

The coverage also emphasized on the reactions of the citizens of the location, following is an example of that: “The rape triggered nationwide outrage and bringing thousands of Delhites onto the streets to protest the incident and highlight how loopholes in the legal system allow rapists to go scot-free.” (The Times of India, 2012f)

The coverage was very detailed, describing the exact location of the crime and follow up of the crime. Dwaipayyan Ghosh, noted in his December 23rd, 2012 article in The Times of India, that “Police are scanning call details of the officials posted between the stretch of Vasant Vihar and Mahipalpur to find out their location on that night. They will also be looking at the logbook details for any dereliction....” (Ghosh, 2012)

There was repeated focus on the prominence of the locations, Delhi, being the country's capital and a metro city, was seemingly more important than other parts of the country. Pranjal Baruah, stated in his December 20th, 2012, article in *the Times of India*,

If a girl is not safe in the national Capital, what we can expect from other states? We believe that security forces need to improvise to deal with growing India. Even in Assam, women work till late at night and need to travel alone these days. However, without strict police patrolling and bolstering the women police wing, the question of women's safety is a distant dream. Where was the patrolling party of Delhi Police when the girl was being tortured in a moving bus? (Baruah, 2012)

Such detailed description of location was not seen in either Pratibha Murthy's or Jisha's rape and murder coverage. Other coverage questioned the infrastructure and facilities in Delhi and assumed that girls and women ought to be safer in big, metro cities, "This is a shocking case. We condemn the incident. If women are not safe in the national capital, where will they go?" (The Times of India, 2012g)

In comparison, after Jisha was raped and murdered in 2016, the focus was on the small-town location in another part of the country. In some articles, the location was not specifically identified; instead it was just referred to as a small town near the state capital, Kochi. "It also comes at a time when Delhi is witnessing protests over the rape-murder of a 29-year-old Dalit law student in a small town near Kerala's Kochi last week," (Hindustan Times, 2016a)

Following is the other example, "Two men were detained on Tuesday for the brutal rape-murder of a 29-year-old Dalit law student in a small town near Kerala's Kochi last week, a crime that drew comparisons with the Delhi 2012 gang rape." (Hindustan Time, 2016c)

Other articles identified the location where Jisha was raped and murdered, but they immediately drew parallels with Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder in New Delhi, "A 30-year-old Dalit law student was raped and murdered on April 28 in Perumbavoor, Ernakulam,

Kerala. The incident sparked condemnation in the country with many drawing parallels with the 2012 Nirbhaya case in New Delhi” (Hindustan Times, 2016d)

Some articles focused on the reasons why geographical location mattered in the coverage of rape and sexual assault. “There was widespread outrage over the Nirbhaya case because every urban woman could relate to it.” (Aneja, 2016)

Of course, incidents of rape or sexual harassment in urban areas in India get much more media attention; however, most scholarly work on the media coverage of rape in India – correctly--focuses on the intersections of class, caste, and religion (Fadnis 2017; Jolly, 2016, Virmani, 2016). However, there has been hardly any value given to location in both scholarly discussions and media critiques. There are direct references to the class and caste of the victim in the rape coverage, which I will discuss in the following section including how the journalists incorporated the caste and class identities of the victim. The coverage also did not address the issue of location based biases that often guide the amount of coverage that a rape incident receives. In the previous chapter, I noted that the journalists I interviewed agreed that the location of the incident makes influences the coverage of the incident. Based on their feedback, I looked for the kind of coverage “location” received in the coverage. As I discussed earlier in this segment, even when location came up in the coverage, it was framed as ‘small-towns’, ‘posh areas,’ and ‘important localities’. This is problematic as it creates a hierarchy in framing the locations, which influences a prejudiced response from the policymakers and the public.

Below, I will discuss the presence of social identities in the news coverage of rape.

Class and caste. The third theme that I focused on is the identity of the victim and of the perpetrator. The Indian caste system is a complex system of social hierarchy “which divides Hindus into rigid hierarchical groups based on their karma (work) and dharma” (BBC, 2017).

There are four castes in the system --- Brahmin, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras and over hundreds of sub-castes within each category. The bottom of the hierarchy are the Shudras, who did all the lowly jobs for the upper castes (BBC, 2017). Historically, the lower castes also belonged to the lower class because of lack of opportunities (Gandhi, 1980). Industrialization, caste-based affirmative action for low castes, and migration to the cities has created economic class structures penetrating the caste system (Mukherjee, 2000; Gandhi, 1980). Therefore, both class and caste and their intersection influence media coverage of any issue. Previous scholarly studies on Indian media coverage of rape have shown the influence of the caste and class identity of the victim in the way the issue is covered; the higher the victim's caste and class are, the more coverage it receives (Fadnis, 2017; Jolly, 2016, Virmani, 2016; Rao, 2013; Joseph, 2008). In the case of rape perpetrators, low class and caste rapists are vilified in the media; the coverage "...highlights the poverty and low-caste status of rape perpetrators who target middle-class and/or modern educated women in urban centres" (Bradley et al, 2017; Bradley, 2017).

In Pratibha Murthy's case, her class and caste were not mentioned explicitly. But caste did not need to be mentioned, because last names in India usually give away the caste of the person; it is not always accurate but last names give an indication of the of the individual's caste. As for her class, there were references to Pratibha's place of residence, her employment with an MNC, her financial background, which indicated that Pratibha belonged to the middle, or upper-middle class echelon of society. Following is an example, where her employment with Hewlett Packard has been highlighted, "Apart from the policemen, the city's IT and ITeS community has been undergoing pangs of anxiety in recent months, brought on by the repeated security alerts and the rape and murder of a call centre staffer in Bangalore" (Ramana, 2005).

Class bias of ignoring victims belonging to low class in media coverage of rape and sexual assault has been identified by scholars such as Patel, 2014, and Sharma, 2010. Readers of the English language newspapers in India usually belong to middle, upper-middle, and higher classes in the Indian society. Therefore, there is a tendency to focus on crime involving victims from these classes of society. The English language newspapers cater to the core readership of urban, educated population; so, when an incident happens involving this demography, there is an increase in the media coverage. Jolly (2016) interviews with journalists in her study and participants of this study substantiated this inclination of the English language newspapers.

Both Patel's (2014, pp 29-30) and Sharma's (2010) discussions of Pratibha Murthy's rape and murder coverage note the focus on the upper-middle class working woman and on how their safety and protection are paramount.

Chavvi Dang, in her article in *The Times of India* published on Jan 3, 2006, indicated the financial standing of Murthy and her family. She wrote, "The security of BPO employees who have to travel late and the recent incidents of rape and murder has forced the police in these two cities to develop a comprehensive action plan." The police are seldom known to develop action plan based on an incident of rape and sexual assault. But the BPO industry demanded police action because of its financial status.

In a similar tone, Jyoti Singh Pandey's caste was left unsaid in the coverage, but as discussed earlier, the last name usually identifies the caste of the individual (Ovichegan, 2015; pp. 54). Jyoti belonged to a distinct category: She was upper caste, but lower middle class, because her family migrated to the city from their ancestral village to the city for more opportunities (Burke, 2013). But there were references to her class, much like in the following

quotation, in which the article focused on the poor village life that she had tried to leave along with her parents and siblings.

A pall of gloom prevailed in the native village of the victim of Delhi gang rape incident, who died early this morning in a Singapore hospital. The cold weather wrapped with fog cover on Saturday morning failed to soothe the anguish of her family members as well as the villagers when they came to know that the girl is no more. The natives of this nondescript village near UP-Bihar border in Ballia district had been praying for the life of the girl for last 13 days. (Hindustan Time, 2012a)

In contrast, the coverage of Jisha's rape and murder concentrated on her lower caste and lower class. In an article published by *The Times of India*, Bengaluru edition on May 8, 2016; Christina Dhanraj, a volunteer for Dalit Women Fight, was quoted on the plight of Dalit women: "A Dalit woman is a Dalit first, her body becomes a lot more dispensable.... The problem is the lack of response from people. We are outraged by this selective outrage."

In some articles, there were accusations of not calling out the caste-based biases against lower-caste and Dalit rape victims. "In contrast, commentators have paid little attention to her caste, a crucial factor that might have determined not only how she lived but how she was killed and how much impunity her killer enjoy." (The Times of India, 2016)

An editorial published in Hindustan Times on May 6, 2016 questioned the police, "The initial lackadaisical approach of the police raises a critical question: Did the police look the other way because the victim was a Dalit?"

That the Dalit women are at the receiving end of violence. whether the life and honor of a Dalit woman is less than that of an upper caste and upper-class woman is noted Jyoti (2016) in

The Hindustan Times:

Caste also decides whether our deaths and crimes against us get reported and acted on, or whether such acts are seen as regular. Dalit women are often at the bottom of this caste power pyramid because of their gender and caste identities. Any attempt at assertion is brutally suppressed and their bodies become the site of caste wars and violence is meted out with impunity to silence them.

Some articles also emphasized similar treatment meted out to lower caste and Dalit victims of rape and sexual assault and how they went unnoticed by the media, policymakers and the citizens:

The Kerala law student's story is another in this sordid saga, one that counts numerous similar assaults on Dalit women that go unnoticed. The same week she was assaulted, Kerala reported the gang rape of a Dalit nursing student. In Telangana, a Dalit student was raped for two weeks by her batch mates³⁸. In Rajasthan, the death and suspected rape of a bright Dalit school student triggered outrage... Though a sexual crime, rape is often an expression of power. This is why Dalit women's bodies become the target of violence as perpetrators are expressing their gender and caste privileges while taking advantage of the impunity that comes with assaulting lower caste bodies (Jyoti, 2016)

There were also references to a series of sex crimes against Dalit women in other parts of the country; some of the coverage implied that the incidence of sex crimes against Dalit women significantly exceeded the cases reported by the news media. The following excerpt published in Hindustan Times, is an example of this reference:

Last month, a Dalit woman on her way to a wedding was abducted and raped allegedly by upper caste men in Haryana. On Holi, a Dalit woman in Agra was allegedly raped by a policeman. And these are just the reports that made it to the newspapers (Jyoti, 2016)

There were also references to Jisha and her family's lower economic class in the coverage, which is evident in the following excerpt:

Ernakulam rural Superintendent of Police P Yathish Chandra GH said, "The murder came to light when the woman's mother, a manual labourer, returned home after 8.30pm. Police believe the murder took place between 1 and 8.30 pm. The victim was found lying semi-naked, with just a cloth covering the top portion of her body. The victim's father has been living separately for the last 25 years. "At present, we do not have a solid lead to go by but there are bits and pieces of information that we are trying to piece together." (Times News Network Kochi, 2016)

³⁸ Batch mate is commonly used in British Commonwealth countries, which according to the Cambridge Dictionary means, someone who is in the same year as you at school, college, or university

Caste and class intersections played a role in the coverage of race and class of rape victims in the US (Patil & Purkayastha, 2015). The intersectional identity of the victim and the perpetrator also became a part of the political coverage in the media coverage. Political leaders and policy makers quickly make the intersectional identities part of a political agenda, which is followed by the media in their coverage (Sampath, 2015)

Politicizing of rape. In Pandey's and Jisha's rape and murder, there was a consistent and overwhelming focus on politics. Murthy's rape and murder had an economic and crime frame; which included quotes from the business leaders and law enforcement officials.

In chapter 3, I discussed the total number of articles that were published in the first two weeks after each rape and murder. In the 29 articles that were published in *The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times* after Jisha's rape and murder in 2016, 26 articles emphasized on politicizing her rape and murder and focused on her rape becoming a campaign rhetoric. Unlike in Jyoti's coverage; which was highly focused on safety of women and policy changes. This indicates a very high percentage of reference to politicizing of rape. In Jyoti Singh Pandey's coverage, 283 out of 550 articles emphasized on the interaction and engagement of political leadership, which is around 51% of the total coverage. One of the reasons of the political coverage in Jisha's rape and murder was the impending state elections in Kerala in May 2016.

Rape coverage becomes part of political coverage in the references to and quotations by policymakers, political decisions, and safety and security measures. Starting with coverage of Pratibha Murthy in 2005, there was a focus on the security measures taken by the policemen, alerts from US agencies on the rape and murder because of Bangalore's importance to the US,

MNC's surveillance, changes in laws like discontinuing tinted glasses in cars, and other policy changes. (Hindustan Time, 2005a)

There was also focus on the steps the police were taking to provide safety to the information technology professionals:

Apart from the policemen, the city's IT and ITeS community has been undergoing pangs of anxiety in recent months, brought on by the repeated security alerts and the rape and murder of a call centre staffer in Bangalore ... Facility and logistics managers of various MNC IT outfits in the city have been kept busy battenning down the hatches. "It's a delicate situation," said the facilities head of an MNC BPO. "Actually, we are confused. We don't know which threat is serious and which not." (Ramana, 2006)

There was also an emphasis on surveillance due to an increase in crime, including rape and sexual assault, in the area.

"After the rape and murder of a BPO employee, the cops want greater transparency: They want the dark tinted sun film on glass shields of all four-wheelers stripped. "They can go for tinted glass but it should be of ISO 2553 standard, and not those cheap dark films," says Saleem, the Deputy Commissioner of Police in Bangalore." (Rakesh, 2005)

There was also repeated media focus on BPO efforts to increase the security of the I.T. professionals employed with the MNCs, specifically for women employees, under pressure from the policymakers and the state government. "The BPOs must have tightened up their security for women employees after the rape incident in Bangalore and Gurgoan. Its resolution for next year is strictly follow the clause - 'safe pick and drop facility for women staffs in 2006.'" (Devi, 2005)

After Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder, there were consistent updates by the media on the initiatives of the policymakers that they were taking to curtail incidents of rape and sexual assault; including increases of patrols in sensitive locations, increasing budgets to combat rape and sexual harassment, debates in Parliament, trying to bring changes in the law and others, which are evident in the following excerpt from an article published in *Hindustan Times*:

Fast-track courts. Imposition of the maximum sentence. Clear all pending cases. Train and sensitize police. Get Parliament to stop weeping before TV cameras and pass at least two pending bills, including the Protection of Women Against Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Bill and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill. Consult with the Ministry of Human Resources and civil society to see how to tackle growing misogyny. It's a beginning (Bhandare, 2012)

Multiple government agencies were involved in creating safer public spaces for women, which got a lot of attention in the media coverage.

It has to get onto the agenda of all stakeholders such as the departments of urban planning, transport, education and health. Responding to violence is one part of the strategy; equally important is the need to create conditions of safety and security which can prevent such crimes (Vishwanath, 2012)

The involvement of the Home Ministry and the justice department in initiating new policies and laws to limit sexual violence and involvement of women political leaders was also included in the coverage:

“The home minister informed the house that the state government had constituted women's assistance cells in the state and counselling centres at police stations. ‘Police personnel have been instructed to be more sensitive on issues concerning women. We have also suggested changes in Evidence Act and Indian Penal Code to plug the loopholes,” said Patil. State women and child development minister Varsha Gaikwad announced that all colleges will now have a woman welfare cell. The debate was initiated by Congress member Mohan Joshi.... Women members from across political parties demanded stringent laws to curb crimes against women.” (Maitra, 2012).

Frequent direct attacks on the government’s inability to provide leadership and direction to the police and other policymakers was highlighted in the newspaper coverage. Following is an excerpt from an article written by a Brinda Karat on the issue in Hindustan Time:

Yet Delhi's top police officials, who should be held accountable and punished for willful violation of the guidelines, indulge in self-praise exercises, while the home minister protects them and castigates the protesters, virtually equating them with the Maoists. The utter failure of governance and the lack of political direction of the UPA marked the events that unfolded in Delhi after the crime. (Karat, 2012)

There was a sustained coverage on the Parliamentary discussions about safety of women in public places, after Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder. This is evident in the following excerpt, published in *The Times of India*:

“Singh said the House should pass a proposal that no lawyer will plead on behalf of the perpetrators of such crime. M Venkaiah Naidu (BJP) said a strong political will was needed to check these "very shameful" incidents. ‘Condolence for the dead and compensation to survivors cannot be a policy,’ he said. ‘Every time an incident like this takes place, Government appears to be helpless. Is there a government, is there a system? The home minister should take moral responsibility,’ Naidu, who is also the chairman of Home Ministry's Standing Committee, said. Prashant Chatterjee (CPI-M) said the unimaginable barbaric incident happened even as the vehicle in which all that took place passed three PCR vans. A television footage showed there was no police at any of these points, he said (Times News Network, 2012d)

There were other references and quotes from political leaders after Jyoti's rape and murder mulling over the collective failure of law enforcement and the government.

In Jisha's rape and murder coverage, the newspaper coverage also emphasized on the political leadership and their quotes on the incident. It is important to note here that when Jisha was raped and murdered the state of Kerala was scheduled for Assembly elections on May 16, 2016. Political campaigning in the state was at its peak when Jisha was raped and murdered and not surprisingly, Jisha's rape and murder became a part of the political campaign against the existing government, which is evident in the article published in Hindustan Times, 2016(a), “The incident might become a factor in the assembly polls on May 16 where the ruling United Democratic Front is locked in a tough battle with the Left Democratic Front.”

Jisha's rape and murder became a key issue during the political campaign, her case was repeatedly referred to even by the Prime Minister when he was on the campaign trail.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday slammed the Congress-led UDF in Kerala over the solar scam and the brutal rape and murder of a Dalit woman in Perumbavoor. Addressing the election rally of NDA at the Fort Maidan here, his first in the series of four in the state, Modi flayed the UDF government for its "failure" to rise to the occasion while handling the rape case (Times News Network, 2016b)

Jisha became an important election issue for the political parties, as is evident in the following quote:

Political parties have rushed in to cash in on the Dalit vote bank in poll season. People have organised themselves into campaigns with street protests and marches in several cities, including Delhi (Hindustan Times, 2016c)

After Jisha's rape and murder, the central government of India offered to help the Kerala state government by providing investigative assistance in the case, but journalists implied in their coverage that the offer to help the state government was a campaign tactic:

BJP has upped the ante against the UDF government in Kerala after the recent brutal rape and murder of a law student with party chief Amit Shah constituting a three-member fact-finding committee to visit the state and home minister Rajnath Singh offering a CBI probe if recommended by the state government (Singh, 2016)

The news article further highlighted that the Home Minister Rajnath Singh had declared in a campaign rally that the Kerala state government was trying to sweep Jisha's rape and murder under carpet.

There was also a focus on how the then government leaders and opposition reacted to Jisha's rape and murder:

Chief minister Oommen Chandy, called on the grieving mother at Perumbavoor hospital and promised the family all help. Opposition leader VS Achuthanandan also met her. 'Perpetrators of this heinous crime will be booked soon. The government will talk to the Election Commission seeking its permission to disburse relief to the family,' he said. Angry workers of the Left front waved black flags when Chandy reached his office." (Hindustan Times, 2016e)

The media heavily concentrated its coverage on the activities of the opposition and government inaction in this case:

Opposition Left Front workers blocked home minister, Ramesh Chennithala's, convoy when he reached the Perumbavur hospital to meet the woman's mother on Tuesday. They shouted slogans against the Congress-led government for rising crimes against

women. The CPI(M) accused the government of inaction. 'Police have failed to get any leads about the culprits even five days after the incident,' party state secretary Kodyeri Balakrishnan said. But home minister Chennithala, who went to the victim's home as well, dismissed the charge. He said police were conducting a "scientific" probe and a manhunt was on to nab the assailants (Hindustan Times, 2016f)

Finally, some coverage emphasized on the steps taken by the police and judiciary, specifically on this case and other cases in the state of Kerala.

The SIT will also check whether she had any connections with the migrants who had been aiding the construction of victim's house near Perumbavoor. The police could not interrogate the sibling as she was looking after her traumatized mother at Perumbavoor *taluk*³⁹ hospital after the incident on April 28 (Thomas, 2016).

Other than the focus on the political campaign, the focus on police activity and what they did to solve the case was more than that of the judicial activity. But the framing of the judiciary also emphasized on the high load of rape cases in the court.

Though a special court was set up in Ernakulum and recently two more in Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram for speedy disposal of cases, over 3,000 rape cases are pending from across the state (Prasanna, 2016)

There were also accusations of police and judicial neglect of the case because of the impending election in the state. "Many campaigners blamed the authorities for neglecting the case because of the assembly elections, due in two weeks." facing heavy criticism for sliding law and order in the state ever since the news broke on Tuesday. (Hindustan Times, 2016e)

Public agenda. After Murthy's rape and murder in 2005, there were concerns about the safety of women in public spaces and on public transport. One of the articles mentions that sense of insecurity in women in public spaces, "Women probably don't feel safe in Bangalore

³⁹ Taluk is a Hindi word, which means district.

anymore. But I am sure things will change once the incident is no longer fresh in the memory."(Nautiyal, 2005)

There was also focus on the concerns and challenges of women working late at night. "But things have changed overnight and that's why Bangalore's working women don't want to take chances. "I never thought twice before taking a taxi back home after work on the days it got late," says Preeti K, communications manager at a hotel." (Nautiyal, 2005)

Pratibha Murthy's rape and murder also hit the transport business hard, as women increasingly felt unsafe traveling alone in taxis at night. "From 100 to only 40, that's how much calls for taxis have dropped by, says the manager at another city taxi service." "Most women used to call us post-11pm, either after work or on their way home from a party." Some transport business owners also noticed a change in the traveling patterns of women at night and voiced their concern about their safety and security. "He's found that women don't travel by cab alone at night anymore." "They're always accompanied by someone else. But they shouldn't worry. We've never had any complaints so far." (Nautiyal, 2005)

The narrative of public agenda in Jyoti's rape and murder coverage was much like Pratibha's coverage, where the public was concerned with the deteriorating safety and security in public spaces and transport. Media coverage of Jyoti's rape concentrated on citizens' demands to political leadership. A leading Delhi-based writer initiated a petition against rape of women and wrote a column in *Hindustan Times*:

Stop Rape Now, I write on change.org in a petition to the President of India and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. It outlines practical solutions, short-term and long. I don't own this petition. It is a manifesto of the collective voices I hear. (Bhandare, 2012)

After Jisha's rape and murder, some of the coverage emphasized on public concerns of difference in response to rapes, which was starkly different from both Pratibha and Jyoti's rape coverage.

Public memory is fickle. So is their reaction to different episodes of a similar nature. Take, for example, the rape and murder of a 30-year-old Dalit woman at Perumbavoor in Kerala on April 28. The brutality of the incident is a chilling reminder of the 2012 gang rape case in Delhi but the public reaction to it has been nothing like what we saw in Delhi (Hindustan Times, 2016d)

Some of the news coverage also called out the existing gender inequality within India's caste system, and the continued discrimination against women. A journalist for *Hindustan Times*, writes the following to locate and highlight violence against women:

There were also voices against gender inequality within the caste system. "They are not allowed to study, compelled to do menial domestic work and unpaid labour, denied health access and financial freedom and wantonly subject to violence, even by men from their own castes." (Hindustan Times, 2016e)

Mention of social media platforms Social media platforms were mentioned by the news media much more in the coverage of Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder than in Jisha's rape. Although between 2012 and 2016, the social media platforms have enhanced their features and increased their users in India, social media engagement in Jyoti Singh Pandey's was much more after Jisha's rape and murder. In the 500 articles that covered Pandey's rape and murder, social media platforms were mentioned 125 times. In comparison, news articles about Jisha's rape and murder mentioned social media platforms only five articles in the 29 articles published the two weeks after her rape and murder. The numbers indicate the kind of coverage that the media gave to the case and the specific social media outrage was influenced by the social identity of the victim and the location of the rape and murder.

Even the conversations on social media platforms were starkly different in the two cases: while in Jyoti Singh Pandey's coverage, the social media discourses largely involved

celebrity outrage, candlelight vigil calls, protest calls, and Facebook pages were created against rape and murder. In contrast, the social media mentions after Jisha's rape and murder were limited to appeals from the government officials (the police and judiciary) against rumor-mongering or politicizing rape and sexual assault.

In the first two weeks of coverage after Jisha's rape and murder, there was hardly any social media outrage on the scale of what was seen in the Nirbhaya case. There were no celebrities leading the social media charge, including a muted response on Facebook from the public.

The coverage related to social media platforms indicated the role they played in the protests, with headlines such as, "Delhi gang rape case: Facebook, Twitter 'anchoring' at protests." (The Times of India, 2012f)

There was also an emphasis on the ways in which citizens were engaging with the social media platforms, by creating petitions or mobilizing support against sexual violence:

"Facebook is an important tool for me," said Ashmeeta Mehendiratta, who runs a website Dabangee.com to mobilise voices against sexual harassment. "When I can't be physically present among the followers of Dabangee, I virtually involve them to get them talking....Text messages and phone calls completed the loop, and Delhi's efficient Metro network including stations like Pragati Maidan, Patel Chowk and Central Secretariat close to India Gate helped the physical movement of protesters, though authorities shut some stations later. Art consultant Deepika Shergill says she decided to attend a protest event at India Gate when she saw a Facebook friend mention that on her newsfeed. A Facebook page called "Mass Protest Against Indian Laws for Rape Cases" is calling for a protest on December 31, and has 1,400 people already saying they will attend (Hindustan Times, 2012e)

The coverage also repeatedly touched on the ability of social media platforms to attract citizens to engage and participate in protest marches.

The crowds were significantly aided by social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook, besides activist blogs. India's estimated 130 million broadband connections, 60 million Facebook users and 35 million Twitterers are dominated by urban youngsters at the heart of the street marches. (HT, 2012e)

There were discussions about online petitions and mass sharing of these petitions, again focusing on the ability of social media platforms to engage ordinary citizens:

On Twitter, writer Kiran Manral suggests an online petition. What good would that do I wonder? But, I begin writing. Writing is cathartic. But this petition (<http://www.change.org/en-IN/petitions/president-cji-stop-rape-now> [<http://www.change.org/en-IN/petitions/president-cji-stop-rape-now>]) has tapped into a simmering anger. In just over 24 hours, we hit 59,000 signatures. Some add suggestions from castration to the death penalty. (Bhandare, 2012)

Some articles highlighted how the protest movements were trending on Twitter:

Twitter, which has about 16 million users in India, has been abuzz with news of the protests, making ‘Rashtrapati Bhavan’, ‘Tahrir Square’ (a reference to street protests that took place in Egypt during the Arab Spring last year), and ‘Raisina Hill’ the top trending words in India (Prasad & Nandakumar, 2012)

Again, much like the mainstream media, social media coverage also indicated that Jisha’s identity was overshadowed by that of Nirbhaya.

The student was brutally gang-raped, she had 30 injuries on her body, her intestines were ripped out. Newspapers and social media are calling her #Nirbhaya2, a reference to the 2012 gang rape of a medical student in Delhi that triggered massive protests in the Capital and inspired changes in India's rape law.

In Jisha’s rape and murder coverage, there were negligible references by the mainstream media on the protest movements organized through the social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, other than a couple of times. “Police have been unable to arrest any suspects, sparking anger among local residents, who have mounted a social media campaign to ensure justice for the victim.” (Hindustan Times, 2016c)

There were also references to what the political leaders were writing on their Facebook pages and less on citizen engagement. “Questioning the ethics behind the "political exploitation" of an inhuman deed, Chandy said in a Facebook post that the people of Kerala were seeing this

brutal murder as a grave social issue.” “The government is handling the issue of this big loss to the woman's family with all seriousness and importance it deserves.” (The Times of India, 2016f)

The impending state elections put the focus on political messages and engagement. There was also media focus on career bureaucrats and their use of social media platforms in Jisha’s rape and murder. For example, a local district government official opened a joint bank account with the victim's mother to help her build a house and used Facebook to ask visitors to not use Jisha’s rape and murder as a photo opportunity (2016d)

Mention of activists. Comments from feminist activists were not included in the news coverage of Pratibha’s rape and murder. However, after Jyoti’s rape and murder, there were repeated references to activists, their views, their engagement, and participation in the protest movements. Media coverage also focused on the recommendations from the activists- especially renowned activists-- for the prevention of rape and sexual assault, such as in the comment:

Kavita Krishnan of All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA), who has emerged a key leader in the protests, said, "People spontaneously stepped out of their homes for the cause. But yes, we mobilised people from campuses, through social media and campaigning (Halder, 2012)

There was a lot of intense coverage of the observations made by feminist activists and the negligence by the state and the policymakers of sexual violence against women. For instance, Kalpana Viswanath, who works on issues of women's safety and rights in cities wrote a column in *Hindustan Times*, (2012) focusing on the hypocrisy of the public, political leaders, and the media for keeping quiet when sexual violence happens against the marginalized castes.

Some feminist activists also focused on the discrepancy in media reporting and policy response when sexual assault involves a lower caste and lower-class victim, in the context of Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder. This is evident in the following excerpt from an article published in Hindustan Times:

Sexual assault occurs with frightening regularity in this country against Adivasi and Dalit women and those working in the unorganised sector, women with disabilities, hijras, kothis, transpeople and sex workers, who are especially targeted with impunity. It calls for the need to evolve punishments that act as true deterrents to the very large number of men who commit these crimes. Our stance is not anti-punishment but against the State executing the death penalty. The fact that cases of rape have a conviction rate of as low as 26% shows that perpetrators of sexual violence enjoy a high degree of impunity, including being freed of charges (Manedar, 2012)

Activists in the news coverage were also mentioned, in the context of offering self-defense classes for women. "The Pune-based Sarhad foundation and the Vande Mataram associations. NGOs working with the youth - have decided to form 'flying squads' comprising college students, which [sic] will be tasked with looking out for and preventing incidents of sexual harassment." (Hindustan Times, 2012g)

In Jisha's rape and murder coverage, the media also covered feminist activists like that of Jyoti's rape and murder coverage; although in Jyoti's coverage, national level activists were quoted and referred to. Unsurprisingly, in Jisha's coverage only local activists were quoted. The coverage in Jisha's case focused on her Dalit caste identity and the biases against her as a victim. Like in the article published in *The Times of India* by Subodh Verma, (2012), in which activist-academic Praveena Kodoth commented that violence against women is much higher in Kerala because of patriarchal pressures.

In yet another article by *The Times of India* (2016e), several feminist activists like Christina Dharaj, Greeshma Rai and others were quoted on the lack of response from the people and selective outrage over rape.

Some articles were concentrated on the suggestions by feminist activists to curb rape and sexual assault like in the following excerpt; where the activist discussed the need to educate and employ women to empower themselves against rape and sexual assault:

Neetha P. of Delhi's Centre for Women's Development Studies underscored the role played by a religious or community-based educational institution system in Kerala to creating a more submissive generation of women. She also pointed at the declining levels of employment in Kerala, especially for women, as one of the factor rape incidents are six times lower, assaults eight times lower and domestic violence three times lower in TN compared to Kerala contributing to the ethos of violence. (Varma, 2016)

Some activists pointed out the fallacy of correlating literacy rates with rape and sexual violence and some others on how feminist activists campaigned against rape:

Women's rights groups and students took to the streets, demanding justice. People started a campaign on social media to put pressure on the state authorities. Women's rights groups and students took to the streets, demanding justice. People started a campaign on social media to put pressure on the state authorities. (*Hindustan Times*, 2016)

Family shame: Blaming the victim is common in coverage of rape and sexual assault (Lodhia, 2015). In the case of Pratibha's rape and murder, the narrative oscillated from the shame that was brought to the family and the husband to how naïve she was to have not checked the driver's details. The victim blaming was less about how she was dressed and what was she doing at that time of the night or even if she was with a man who was not her husband/father/brother; rather, it was focused on her naivety of handling the situation (Reddy, 2011). Because of her marital status, somehow the crime became more heinous. In past media narratives, raping a married woman or a woman with a child was a bigger crime for the husband and the husband's family than for the woman. In this instance, the same thing happened.

After Jyoti Singh Pandey was raped, some political leaders referred to her condition as that of "Zinda laash", which means a living corpse (Lodhia, 2015). A woman who has been raped has no honor, hence her life is not worth living. Rape is social stigma, in which the

families honor has been commonly focused on by the media and the society (Nair, 2014).

Stigmatizing rape and sexual assault is common practice (Lodhia, 2015), which was repeatedly seen in the coverage of Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape.

In Jisha's rape and murder coverage, the frame of the family shame focused the mother's trauma and shame, like in the following excerpt:

"Traumatized mother is bed-ridden in a hospital. "We had complained to police about the danger to our lives. The tragedy could have been averted had they taken timely action," she said. It could not be ascertained what dangers the family faced and if the suspects in police custody are the real culprits. Police refused to reveal details of their investigation." (Hindustan Times, 2016h).

In the following segment, I will discuss the analysis of Facebook posts of three feminist pages.

Analysis of Facebook posts of Feminism in India, For Women in India, Indian Feminism, and Breakthrough India

Social media platforms are often portrayed as democratic platforms for marginalized communities and demographics (Chattopadhyaya, 2011). However, in recent years, descriptions of online platforms as comparatively more democratic spaces because they apparently circumvent the gatekeeping of the mainstream media have been questioned by scholars. The celebrations of the social media platforms as catalysts for change have been criticized, since the challenges of communicating on these platforms are overlooked, given the problems of access, commercialization of social media platforms and digital literacy (Iosifidis, 2014; Mejias, 2013). I decided to include social media analysis of two of the three rape and murder cases because there were no social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter in 2005, when Pratibha Murthy was

raped and murdered. The social media analysis would to assess whether social media platforms are a truly democratic space, which consistently expresses outrage against rape and pledges support for the victim. I question and assess if social media platforms are equally selective like the mainstream media in pledging support for rape victims and trying to build an agenda against rape, irrespective of the social identity of the victim.

I used Netvizz, a Facebook application which allows downloading of Facebook data from specific pages for a specific duration. I also used the search function of Netvizz and searched for the anti-rape activism pages that originated in India. I found 58 pages on anti-rape feminism, and downloaded data for the pages that had fan counts of 1000 and more, this reduced the number to nine Facebook pages. Of those nine pages, only three were still active. The remainder had become inactive or had stopped posting after 2015. Since I wanted to analyze the posts and the network connections generated after Jyoti Singh's rape and murder in 2012 and Jisha's rape and murder in 2016, I could not take into consideration the pages that stopped posting after 2015. I then used Facebook Application Programming Interface (API) to cull the creation date for each of the pages and noted that most of these pages were initiated in 2012 and early 2013, after Jyoti Singh's rape and murder happened. The three pages that I used for this analysis were Breakthrough India, Feminism in India; and 21st Century India, "Against RAPE."

I used Gephi, as a data visualization tool, to visualize these pages, and assessed the categories of page comments, likes, shares and posts, and strongly connected pages in the Facebook network. I completed a detailed analysis of the specific pages and groups in each category. News and media websites were the most popular and engaged on all the three webpages.

The common rhetoric across the three pages was the focus on the message that men needed to stop raping women to protect the female members of their family. If they continue to physically assault women and rape them, then in future, someone else would rape their mothers, sisters, wives and girlfriends. This reasoning is based on a common Indian rhetoric “*Tumhari bhi Ma-Behein hain, kuch sharm karo*” (Have some shame for this behavior, you have female members in your family too). Essentially, such messages emphasized on shaming the honor of the family. Women in Indian families are often perceived as the honor of family; their actions either keep the honor of the family or diminish it (Hegde, 2011).

Breakthrough India. Breakthrough India is a non-profit community organization based in New Delhi, India. On their website and Facebook page, Breakthrough India describe themselves as “a human rights organization working to make violence and discrimination against women and girls unacceptable.” On their website, they further explain their work in this way: “Our cutting-edge multimedia campaigns, community mobilization, agenda-setting, and leadership training equip men and women worldwide to challenge the status quo and take bold action for the dignity, equality, and justice of all.” Breakthrough India first started in 2000. They work on various issues, including sexual harassment. I emphasized on Breakthrough India’s social media campaign, since they are known to develop digital and other multimedia campaigns around rape and sexual violence.

The following data visualizations indicate the categories of Facebook pages Breakthrough India most engaged with. The most engaged pages were from the news media and community pages. Breakthrough India follows a number of community, media, education and other categories of pages on Facebook.

The following graph indicates that Breakthrough India follows a total 143 pages. Facebook has many overlapping categories for the pages, such as community, cause, non-profit, non-governmental organizations all represent activist groups or pages on Facebook. Similarly, media, news media, news organization, publishing represent groups or pages associated with news and media. To streamline the overlapping categories, I combined the overlapping categories to calculate the categories. In 143 pages that are followed by Breakthrough India, 94 pages are categorized under community, causes, non-profit, non-governmental organizations, and other similar pages related to activism; which is 65.7% of the total number of pages it follows. Breakthrough India follows 16 pages categorized under media, news media, publication, magazine, which forms 11.1% of the total number of pages. Finally, government, political leaders, and politics is 2% of the total number of pages. I have combined all other categories such as interest, music, leisure, armed forces, entertainment and more in one category of “Others,” since each of these categories had one page under them. The others category made up 20.9%, of the total number of pages. This indicates the inclination of a feminist activism page connecting with other activism-based pages and the media.

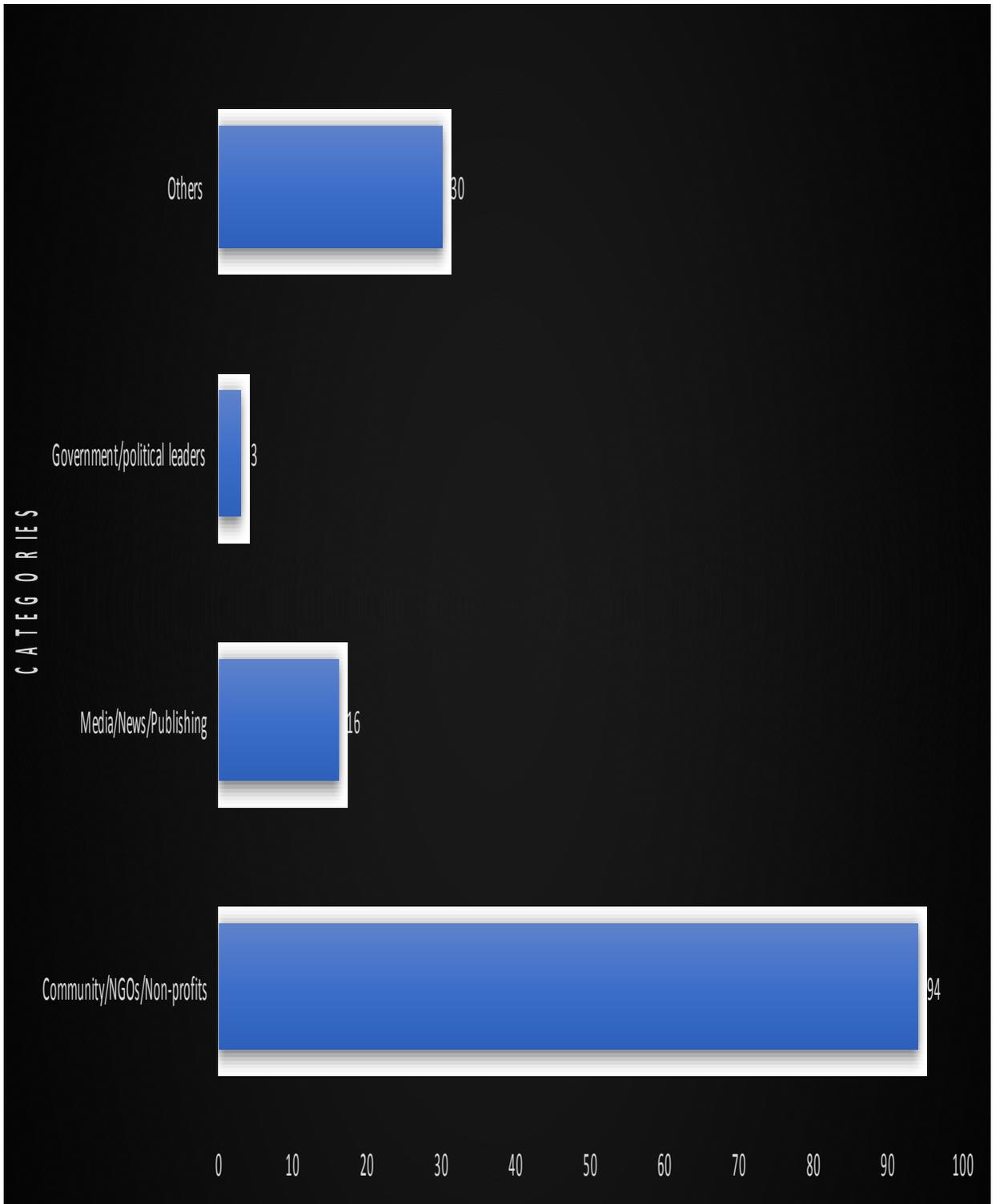


Figure 2: Categories and number of pages followed by Breakthrough India

The following figure is a data visualization of the strongly connected pages in Breakthrough India's network. This data visualization has been created in Gephi, an open source data analysis and data visualization tool. Gephi assessed the strongly connected pages in Breakthrough India's network by abstracting the number of weakly connected components from the number of strongly connected components. The components, or nodes, in a social network, which have a strong capability to influence and share information between them, become strongly connected components. The components or nodes in a social network, which do not have the ability to influence the central component (here the Facebook page), by sharing information. Gephi detected 50 strongly connected nodes or pages and 2 weakly connected nodes in Breakthrough India's Facebook network. In the following visualization, the strongly connected pages in the network are identified by the number 48. Community or non-profit and media or news media are the strongly connected nodes on this page. *Clinton Global Foundation, Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation, Feminism in India, Hollaback, International Women's Health Network, A thin line, Blank Noise* and other similar international organizations make the strongly connected nodes on this page. Alternate news websites such as Women's web and BuzzFeed are also strongly connected nodes on this page. It is not surprising that Breakthrough India has a strong connection with other international and global non-profits, Breakthrough India is an international non-profit with offices in India and U.S. This helps them create a network with other similar non-profits or activism groups.

Breakthrough India was one of the few organizations that had a Facebook page during Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder in 2012 and Jisha's rape and murder t in 2016.

Breakthrough India first created a Facebook page in 2010.

I extracted page and user comments from Breakthrough India's Facebook page for the first two weeks after each rape, following the same pattern that I did with the mainstream media. Jyoti Singh Pandey was raped on December 16, 2012, and she succumbed to her injuries on December 29, 2012. I wanted to focus on the social media commentary during the first two weeks after Pandey was rape. I followed the same procedure after Jisha was raped and murdered on April 29, 2016. Table 1 notes the quantitative data collected over that two-week period after Pandey and Jisha's rape and murder.

Name of case	Date range of data collection	Place and Date of Rape	Total number of comments	Comments on the specific rape	% of total number of comments
Jyoti Singh Pandey rape and murder	12/17/2012 to 12/31/2012	Delhi, December 16, 2012	37	25	65%
Jisha rape and murder	4/29/2016 to 5/12/2016	Peumbavoor, Kerala; April 28, 2016	63	26	41.2%

Table 5. Percentage of comments on Breakthrough India’s Facebook India

The numbers indicate that even the digital feminist platforms gave importance to the cases. In digital activism, four years are many light years regarding digital innovation. Postings over the two-week period increased 1.7 times. In 2016, there were 63 posts over a span of two weeks, 1.7 times more as compared to 2012, when there were only 37 posts. However, as indicated in Table 1, despite a lower number of Facebook posts, a higher number of posts were written about Jyoti Singh Pandey’s rape and murder as compared to Jisha’s rape and murder. Sixty-five percent of the total number of posts focused on Jyoti’s rape and murder in 2012, compared to only 41.2% of the total posts about Jisha’s rape and murder in 2016. In 2012, some of the other posts included promotional posts of a television with the Vice President of

Breakthrough India, gender inequality in the workforce in India, and the campaign against gender violence. In 2016, posts other than Jisha's rape and murder included counseling advice for individuals in abusive relationships, open positions for hiring, donation against child marriage, and cyberstalking.

I completed a word cloud for the published comments on Breakthrough India's Facebook page rather than a thematic analysis, as most of the posts were very short. A word cloud helped to focus on words, based on their impact. The following is a word cloud of the Facebook posts published after Jyoti Singh Pandey was raped in December 2012. The focus is on women, rape, public, protest, police, issue, sharing, and India. The prominent words from the comments are not surprising since the focus of the initiative was on building a protest movement with the support of the public against rape in India.

In contrast, and again, not surprisingly, the prominent words in the posts about Jisha's rape and murder were Dalit, violence, Kerala, Jisha, caste and India. Caste identity and violence against Dalit women became the buzzwords. The Facebook comments emphasized on the caste identity of Jisha and recreated a movement tagline DalitWomensLivesmatter like BlackLivesMatter. The Facebook comments highlighted on the discrimination and marginalization faced by Dalit women when they are victims of rape. Facebook in this case provided a space for the subaltern to protest against discrimination. Unlike, in the mainstream news media coverage; the *Dalit* was overshadowed.

Feminism in India. Another leading digital feminist activist group Feminism in India (FII), started its initiative and created a Facebook page in March 2013. On their Facebook page, they describe themselves as:

Award-winning intersectional feminist digital platform to learn, educate & develop a feminist sensibility and unravel the F-word among the youth in India. This page aims to raise issues concerning violence and prejudices against women in India as well as other countries. It is a place for debate and discussion and hopes to make people more aware about the current issues.

Feminism in India has a network relationship with 127 Facebook pages on communities and non-profits; media and publishing; government and political leaders and others (leisure, armed forces and others). The following graph indicate the number of pages in each category; community, cause, non-profits make 64.5% of the total number of pages, media, news media and publishing is a distant second at 13.8% and government and political leaders at 6.2%. I combined all the other categories because they had only one page categorized under them.

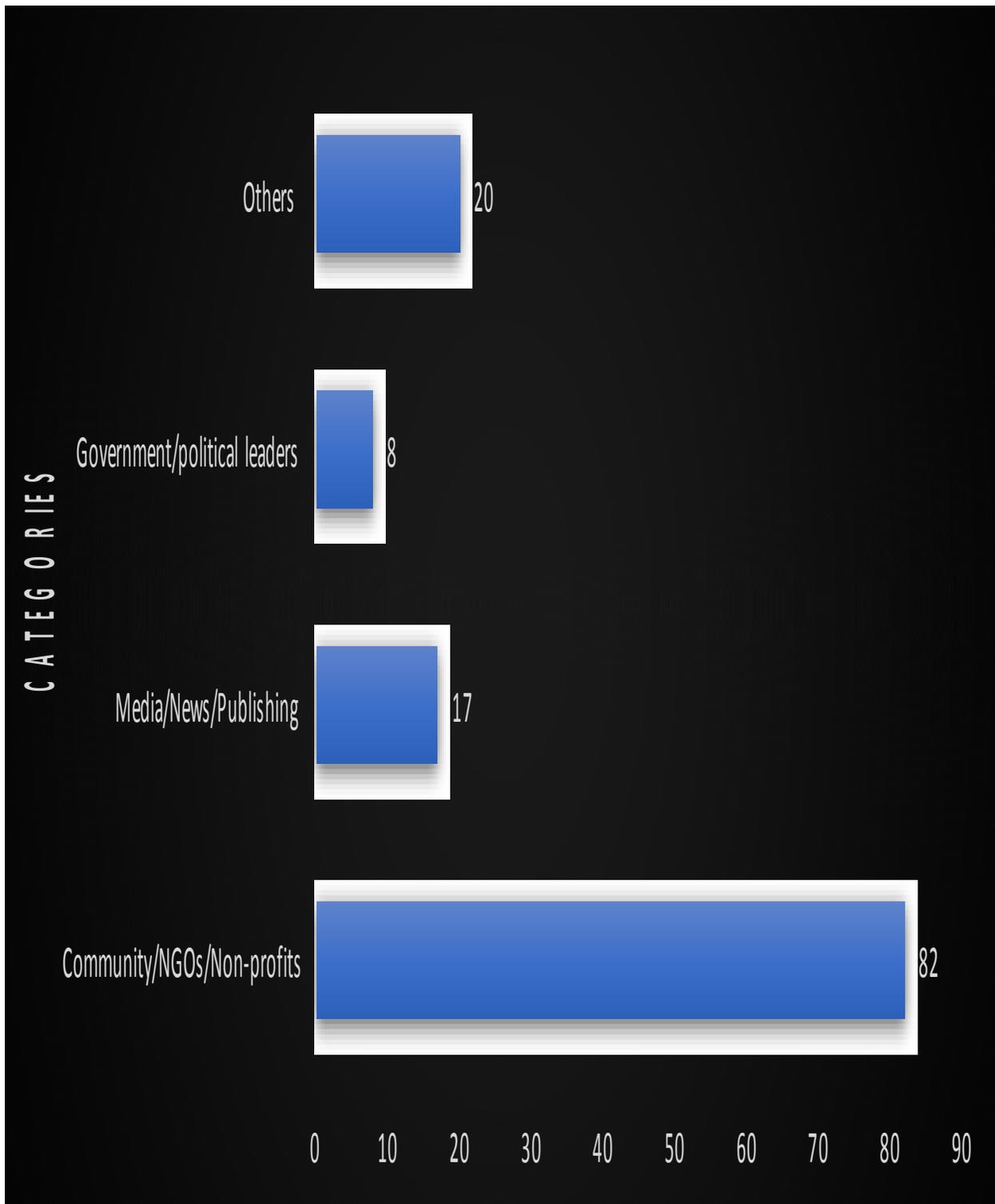


Figure 6 Categories and number of pages followed by Feminism in India

The following figure is a data visualization of the strongly connected pages in Feminism in India's network. This data visualization has been created in Gephi, an open source data

analysis and data visualization tool. Gephi assessed the strongly connected pages in Feminism in India network by abstracting the number of weakly connected components from the number of strongly connected components. The components or nodes in a social network, which have a strong capability to influence and share information between them, become strongly connected components. The components or nodes in a social network, which do not have the ability to influence the central component (read Facebook page), by sharing information. Gephi detected 49 strongly connected nodes or pages and 1 weakly connected node in Feminism in India's Facebook network. The strongly connected pages are calculated by subtracting the weakly connected node from the strongly connected nodes. In the following visualization, the strongly connected pages in the network are identified by the number 48. Community or non-profit and media or news media are the strongly connected nodes on this page, *Breakthrough India*, *SlutWalk Delhi*, *Blank Take back the tech*, *SATRANG-- The Gay India*, *Hollaback*, *We end violence* and other similar domestic and international organizations make the strongly connected nodes on this page. Alternate news websites such as DW: Women talk online, Upworthy and Jaago Re are also strongly connected nodes on this page. Feminism in India shares strong network with similar non-profits or activism groups and other alternate media pages. It does not share any network with the mainstream new media.

I also extracted comments posted and shared by FII after Jisha's rape and murder and on the first anniversary of Pandey's rape and murder. In the two weeks after Jisha was raped and murdered, there were a total of 96 posts on Feminism in India's Facebook page, but only 11 comments discussed Jisha or her rape or murder. FII was initiated after Jyoti was raped and murdered in 2012. So, considering its reach and popularity I analyzed posts published on the first anniversary of Jyoti's rape and murder. After assessing the Facebook comments after Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder, I had expected that engagement with Jisha's rape and murder would be at least 25%. Since FII was founded after Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder in 2013 and it had around 18% of the posts in the first anniversary Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder in December 2013. In 2016, FII was a more active platform as compared to 2013, when Jisha's rape and murder happened in 2016, I anticipated that there would more percentage of posts compared to Pandey's rape and murder.

Name of case	Date range of data collection	Place and Date of rape	Total number of comments	Comments on the specific rape	% of total number of comments
Jyoti Singh Pandey rape and murder	12/16/2013 to 12/31/2013	Delhi, December 16, 2012	32	6	18.75%
Jisha rape and murder	4/29/2016 to 5/12/2016	Peumbavoor, Kerala; April 28, 2016	96	11	11.46%

Table 6. Percentage of total number of comments on Feminism in India Facebook page

Even among the top 26 comments, which were the most shared, most liked, and most commented content on, only two comments from the top 26 comments referred to Jisha, one of the comments illustrated:

“Her name is Jisha. She is NOT Another Nirbhaya. #JusticeForJisha” Jisha is self-made woman. Everything she achieved was through her efforts. Her mother was paranoid who never let anyone near them.”

The next post is more detailed, exploring the caste and class intersectionality for Jisha, and pinpointing how mainstream media report on sexual violence against Dalit women:

Been reading a lot of articles written in the aftermath of Jisha s rape and murder asking is Kerala really safe for women? or is Kerala STILL safe for women? So please let me break it to you: Kerala isn safe for women. It never has been safe for women. And it

never will be safe for women. It is patriarchal and it is casteist. And no 100% literacy doesn't make a shit of a difference. Kerala is home for me- I have a number of fond memories of spending weeks at my grandmothers house learning how to make flower garlands listening to endless stories of Mahabharata and Ramayana arguing with her about whether god really exists. But it is also peppered with some of my worst memories of harassment- being groped flashed stalked and leered at by men on the streets in broad day light. All this despite making it a point to dress in the baggiest of clothes seem as inconspicuous as possible and never stepping out alone after 6 pm. We seem to have woken up to gender violence in Kerala only after the brutal rape and murder of Dalit law student Jisha (we all know her name because the media didn't find her caste and class status worthy enough to be given some patronizing title like Amanat or Damini: except of course some scattered references to her as Kerala's Nirbhaya). Her mother has stated that she was in constant fear for Jisha's security so much that she had given her daughter a pen camera - because neighbours had been threatening her constantly and she was regularly subjected to street harassment. They complained to the cops who did nothing because didn't you know as a woman street harassment comes as a part and parcel of daily life? So again we waited till she was raped murdered left to die with her intestines hanging out of her body till we could give a shit (that too only days after the actual incident because nobody really cared to report on it till then- after all she's a Dalit does it really make a difference to our privileged and casteless lives?) I've said it before and I'm saying it again: Violence against a woman isn't only real when it's rape. It's real when she is groped on the street it's real when a man tries to touch himself sitting next to her on a bus it's real when she's whistled at and called baby or pataka. Let's maybe start giving a shit about women while they are alive instead of waiting for them to die and turning them into martyrs. "I'm sure her name has been revealed because of some other reasons and not because she was a Dalit. A human being is a human being adding a caste like dalit or sc doesn't change anything." (*sic*)

FII in its Facebook page similarly followed and engaged with media organizations like SccopWhoop, Upworthy, Youth Ki Awaaz and others. FII follows alternate sources of media. Most of these are not mainstream media organizations, but alternate news websites, which are only available online.

Jyoti's rape and murder anniversary in 2013 coincided with the LGBTQ rights and imposition of Article 377 in India. Most of the posts published on the anniversary coincided with LGBTQ rights.

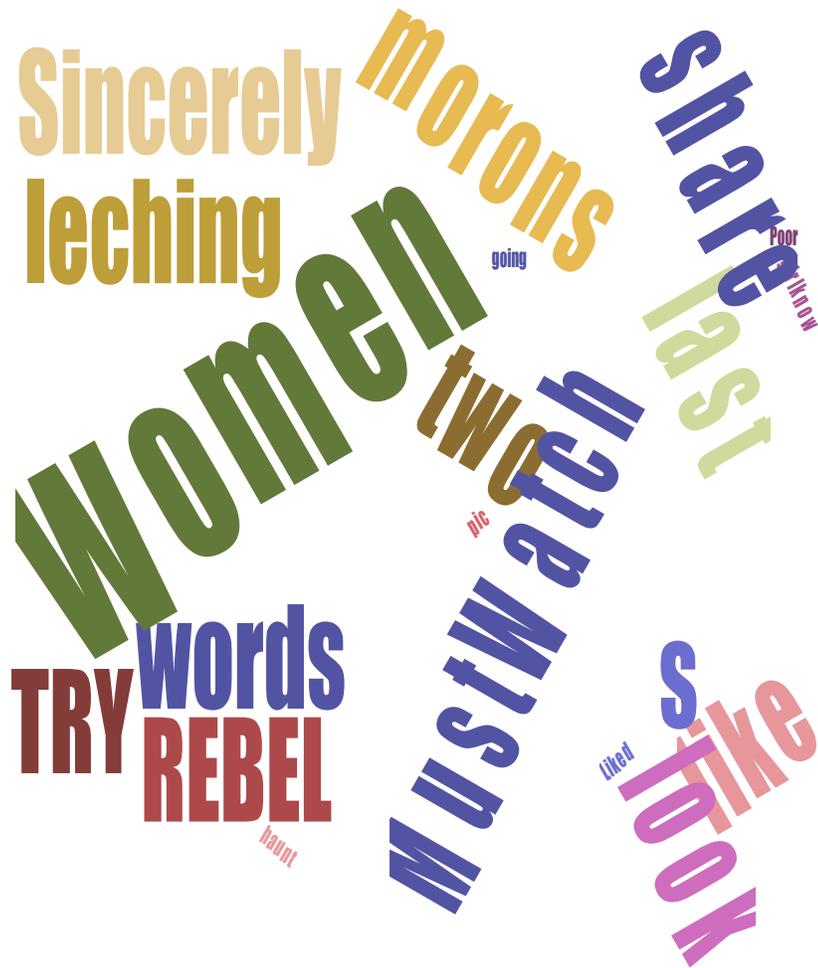


Figure 8 Word cloud of comments from Facebook page of Feminism in India, 2013

After Jisha's rape and murder, the posts published on FII's Facebook page focused on the location, caste identity of Jisha as a Dalit, and of Nirbhaya (Jyoti Singh Pandey). I see this as Jisha's identity being overlooked and Nirbhaya's identity overriding Jisha's. Unlike Nirbhaya, Jisha has a separate identity, so giving her the Kerala's Nirbhaya or Nirbhaya 2 name changed is taking her identity away, because Jisha's social identity is different from that of Jyoti Singh Pandey (Nirbhaya). Jisha was a Dalit and Jyoti Singh Pandey was an upper caste women. Jisha was from the southern state of Kerala and Jyoti Singh Pandey from the country capital New Delhi. These are significant differences in discussing the social identity of the victim.

There could be a counter argument that Nirbhaya 2 made Jisha's plight and her rape relatable to the public, however, Jisha and Jyoti Singh Pandey both belonged to different caste and class location. It cannot be denied that since lower castes and Dalits are at the bottom of the social hierarchy in India; criminal offenses against them are not highlighted in the mainstream media (Rani, 2016). I argue that when the mainstream media has apathy to report on criminal offences on Dalits and lower castes in India, overshadowing Jisha's identify with an upper-caste rape victim, it underplays her *Dalit* identity.

21st Century India against rape. 21st Century India against rape is another digital advocacy group that created a Facebook page in December 2012. It initiated its activism in December 2012, after Jyoti Singh's rape and murder. On its Facebook page, it describes its agenda as, "Raise Your Voice against RAPE AND ACID ATTACKS. Developed Platform to Raise Voice Against RAPE AND ACID ATTACKS." This is still one of the most active pages on Facebook on anti-rape activism in India.

Feminism in India has a network relationship with 114 Facebook pages on communities and non-profits; media and publishing; government and political leaders and others (leisure, armed forces and others). The following graph indicate the number of pages in each category; community, cause, non-profits make 49.1% of the total number of pages, media, news media and publishing is a distant second at 10.5% and government and political leaders at 10.5%. I combined all the other categories because they had only one page categorized under them.

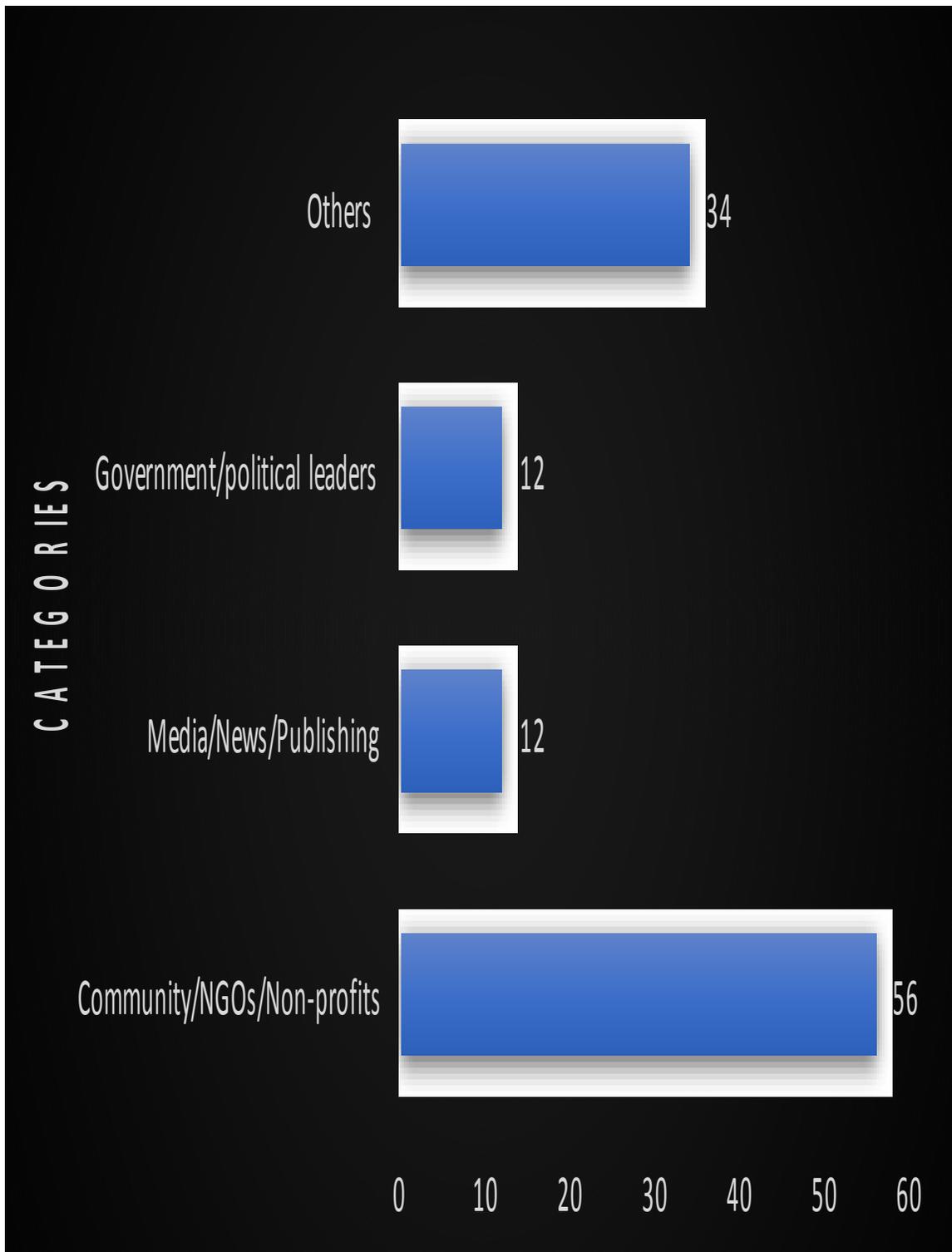


Figure 9 Categories of pages followed by 21st Century India against rape

I created the following data visualization in Gephi on the strongly connected social network of 21st Century India Against Rape. The components or nodes in a social network, which have a strong capability to influence and share information between them, become strongly connected components. The components or nodes in a social network, which do not have the ability to influence the central component (read Facebook page), by sharing information. Gephi calculated 102 strongly connected components in the network and 1 weakly connected components, which resulted in 101 strongly connected components in the Facebook network of the page. Community or non-profit and media or news media are the strongly connected nodes on this page as well, *Carmagender*, *Abhaaforwomen*, *TrustBetrayedJusticeDemanded*, *PriceOfSilence SaathBeingTogether* and other similar domestic organizations make the strongly connected nodes on this page. Unlike the previous pages, this page has strong connections with mainstream media pages on Facebook such as *Channel 4 News*, *Navbharat Times* and *others* are also strongly connected nodes on this page. 21st century India against rape on Facebook is connected with many domestic and rural non-profit groups on Facebook, unlike Breakthrough India, which has strong connections with international non-profits.

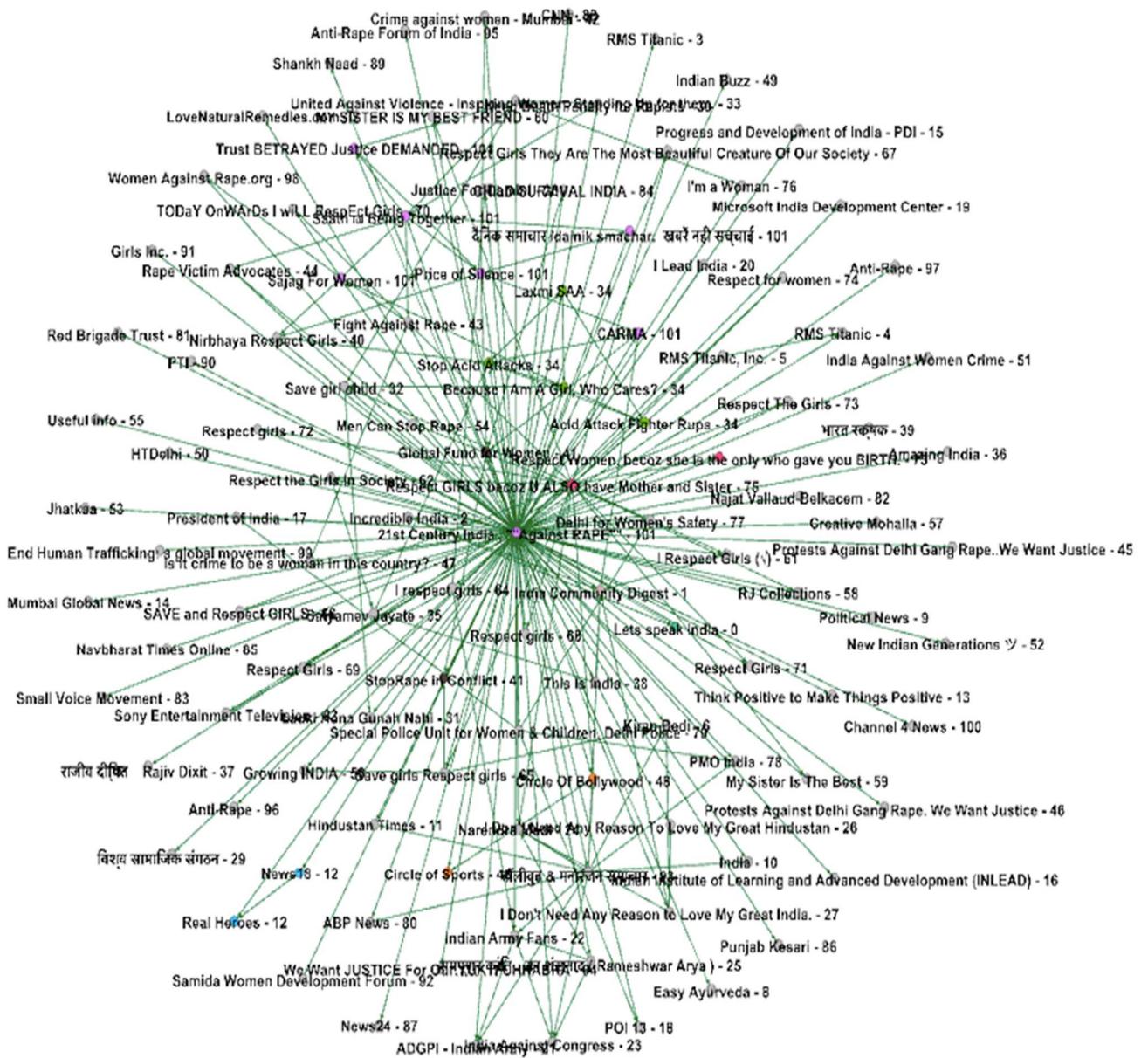


Figure 10 Strongly connected pages in 21st Century India against rape Facebook network

I extracted comments from this page after Pandey’s and Jisha’s rape and murder. Unsurprisingly, this group also focused on Pandey’s rape and murder more than Jisha’s, which is evident from the number of posts shared on Facebook. Table 3 gives an overview of the engagement of this Facebook page with the specific incidents.

Name of case	Date range of data collection	Place and Date of Rape	Total number of comments	Comments on the specific Rape	%of the total number of comments
Jyoti Singh Pandey rape and murder	12/17/2012 to 12/31/2012	Delhi, December 16, 2012	17	16	94.11%
Jisha rape and murder	4/29/2016 to 5/12/2016	Peumbavoor, Kerala; April 28, 2016	3	20	15%

Table 7. Percentage of comments on Facebook page of 21st Century rape against India

The type of comments also differed in both the cases. After Pandey's rape, most comments from followers, and the owner of the page, discussed the type of punishment that rapists deserved. There were detailed discussions on the quantum of punishment that rapists should be given. One of the top comments, that is most shared, engaged and liked was the demand of castration of rapists.

21st Century India Against Rape framed women not as individuals but as daughters, mothers, wives and honored possessions of the country. Their worth is defined by gendered role they play in their families.

Some of the most important words were respect, petition, save, society, and support.

I didn't want to pick one Indian language over the others. I can only anticipate that I possibly missed out on the citizen engagement and outrage. Often, grass root activists and rural citizens feel comfortable in engaging in their native language. Some words and phrases are also distinct in the Indian languages, which are hard to translate to English or translate from one Indian language to another. I assume that there is a possibility that I overlooked the rich, engaging Facebook conversations on the rapes, the reasons of rape and the participation of the local activists.

Discussion

In this section I will discuss the responses to the research questions.

RQ 5: What are the patterns of mainstream media coverage of rape?

In this study, I only went back to 2005, to compare coverage of rape in Indian English language media to recent years. The preliminary findings across the themes indicate that there have been a few changes in rape coverage. In Table 4, I have listed the number of times each theme occurred in the coverage of Murthy, Pandey and Jisha's rape and murder. Compared to Murthy and Jisha's rape and murder media coverage; Pandey's rape coverage was significantly more. It would not be a stretch to state that the coverage and attention to Pandey's rape and murder is an outlier. Overall, there is an increase in reference to celebrity bites; promoting the newspaper agenda, reference to public agenda and reference to the caste and class and the geographical location of the victim. Although there has not been much changes in some of the themes in rape and sexual assault coverage like references to activists and the kind of work they are involved in to spread awareness against rape and sexual assault. There is a clear gap between the coverage of rape and sexual assault and the work done by activists and activist groups to combat rape and sexual assault. In the recent past, specifically after social media platforms have become popular and accessible to the public, there is an increase in the references to public opinion and identifying public agenda in rape and sexual assault agenda.

However, rape and sexual assault of similar brutality still gets inconsistent and uneven coverage. Victims of rape and sexual assault are valued according to their social and geographical identities, which is evident in the news coverage.

Rape still continues to be a political issue, whenever rape and sexual assault happens during election campaigns, anti-incumbency and others. Politicizing the coverage of rape gives

prominence to the political leaders and political issues, deviating from addressing the issues and reasons, which led to rape and sexual assault.

Both Murthy's and Pandey's rape and murder media coverage led to policy changes. BPO, Information Technology (IT) and Information Technology enabled services (ITes) organizations where women worked late night shifts were now required to provide security, if they were the last one to be dropped home. Usually, male colleagues would offer to be dropped last. As a journalist in India, I have done many night shifts at the work, and more than often in the car pool, I would be dropped off first or second. The only time I was dropped off last when the car pool had 6 women returning home at 2 a.m. in the morning in a flooded city. After Pandey's rape and murder, the Verma commission was instituted and the recommendations included an overhaul of policies for rape and sexual assault victims, which resulted in the *Criminal Law Amendment Act of 2013*. The media widely covered the recommendations. However, from Jisha's rape and murder it can be assumed that not much had changed on the ground. After Jisha was raped and murdered, her mother and sister alleged that Jisha was stalked and harassed and the law enforcement did not register her case. Her complaint was dismissed as verbal abuse and no complaint was registered. The mainstream media did not cover these details, but alternate news websites such as *Quartz* and a few other news blogs discovered this. This happened despite the fact that Jisha's rape and murder was politicized during the election campaign but there were no concrete outcomes such as providing a training to the law enforcement or integrating the work of anti-rape activists to spread awareness on rape and sexual assault.

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Pratibha Murthy's rape and murder coverage</u>	<u>Jyoti Singh Pandey's rape and murder coverage</u>	<u>Jisha's rape and murder coverage</u>
<i>News Value</i>	0	383	21
<i>Location</i>	3	227	127
<i>Caste & Class</i>	2	235	39
<i>Politicizing rape</i>	12	279	25
<i>sPublic agenda</i>	2	101	33
<i>Mentioning social media platforms</i>	N/A	Facebook :119 Twitter: 65 Social media: 28 Total: 212	Facebook: 2 Twitter: 0 Social media: 8 Total: 10
<i>Mentioning activists</i>	2	123	4
<i>Victim blaming</i>	0	2	4

Table 8: The number of times each theme occurred in the coverage of the rapes



Figure 13 *Distribution of themes across media coverage*

As shown in the figure above, the social and geographical identities of the victims and the perpetrators has been a consistent pattern in rape and sexual assault coverage. Higher caste of rape and sexual assault victims are explicitly indicated by the repeated use of their last names. In contrast, the lower caste of the victim is clearly stated in the news coverage. The emphasis on the caste affiliation of the victims has remained consistent, irrespective of the influence of social media platforms in newsroom rape coverage. Many have accused mainstream media of gatekeeping information due to corporate, political compulsion or social biases (Phadnis, 2017; Jolly, 2016). The gatekeeping also contributes to the consistent rape and sexual assault coverage.

I will now discuss the findings of the following research question:

RQ 6: How did the feminist activist groups use Facebook to build public agenda on rapes of Jyoti Singh Pandey and Jisha?

I analyzed textual and non-textual content shared by three feminist activist groups on Facebook. The feminist groups created a strong network by following Facebook pages of alternate news websites such as *Upworthy*, *Scoopwhoop* and others; feminist and activist groups and mainstream news such as *ABP*, *Star News*, *The Times of India* and others. Facebook categories each page to their pre-assigned groups such as community, personality, media organization, news, and others. The feminist groups have an inclination of following Facebook pages which are classified as community and media organizations.

The feminist activist groups on Facebook posted textual and non-textual content such as images, memes and videos on equal rights of women, proposed judicial action against rape, domestic violence, online trolling and other related issues. The pages encouraged their followers to comment on their posts and share them. The most shared and commented posts were topical. Non-textual content such as images and video also generated most engagement from the public.

The posts were intended for the public and not for the policy makers, as most posts asked for the reaction of the people who followed them and also asked them to share their content.

Mainstream media coverage of rape and sexual assault and use of social media platforms for anti-rape activism operate in silos. Other than Pandey's rape and murder, the public outrage, discussion and impact on mainstream media and social media has been muted. After Jisha's rape and murder, no official action was taken against the law enforcement officials who failed to take her complaint the first time around. There was an increase in the police complaints against sexual assault and rapes in 2013⁴⁰, many attributed this phenomenon to Pandey's rape and murder and the Criminal Act Amendment of 2013. However, it is not surprising to note that from 2015 onwards, the annual NCRB reports have shown a decline in the number of cases registered for rape, sexual assault and molestation. The number of rape and sexual assault convictions have always been low, in 2013 and in 2016. Journalists and activists have pointed out that the law enforcement officials are always in a haste to register and conclude the 'case, 'without following the protocol, result in loss of evidence and information. The gap between policies, implementing the policies, understanding the policies and making the public aware can be reduced if the mainstream news media and the social media groups worked in cohesion.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the summaries of the findings, recommendations, limitations of the study, future research and conclusion.

⁴⁰ According the annual report published by the National Crime Bureau Research of India (NCRB). 184

Chapter 6: Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter, I will summarize the findings of this study, make recommendations for practitioners and scholars, and discuss future avenues for this research. In academia, a frequently asked question in any study is what is its significance within the discipline and for a non-academic audience. In every class of the Ph.D. program at Merrill College, we discussed the “so-what” question: Why should this study matter and what changes can it bring? The overarching research question for this study is “in what ways do anti-rape feminist activists build public agenda around rape and sexual assault in a digitally emerging country like India?” Rape and sexual assault are concerns not just in India, but globally. Across cultures and countries incidents of rape and sexual assault are similarly framed by the media, who neglect the marginalized and often partake in victim blaming (Abrahams et al., 2014). However, every country has some distinct socio-cultural and political characteristics. Culturally, economically, politically and digitally, India is one of the most diverse countries in the world. This study proposes a nuanced framework of agenda building on rape, which will help in establishing a theoretical framework to examine media coverage of issues in the digitally emerging countries of the Global South, rather than categorizing the findings in the perspectives of the Global North.

Before I explain the data, I will lay out the interdependent agenda building model, as I envision it, and discuss two recent cases.

The point of the interdependent agenda building model (Figure 1) is to demonstrate the ability of the mainstream news media and social media platforms, when combined, to build a public and political agenda. In this process, activists and citizens simultaneously disseminate information to both mainstream media and social media platforms to build an agenda on the issue. Interdependent agenda building is unlike traditional agenda building, which assumes that

media organizations and journalists can build an agenda for the public on specific issues (Nisbet, 2008).

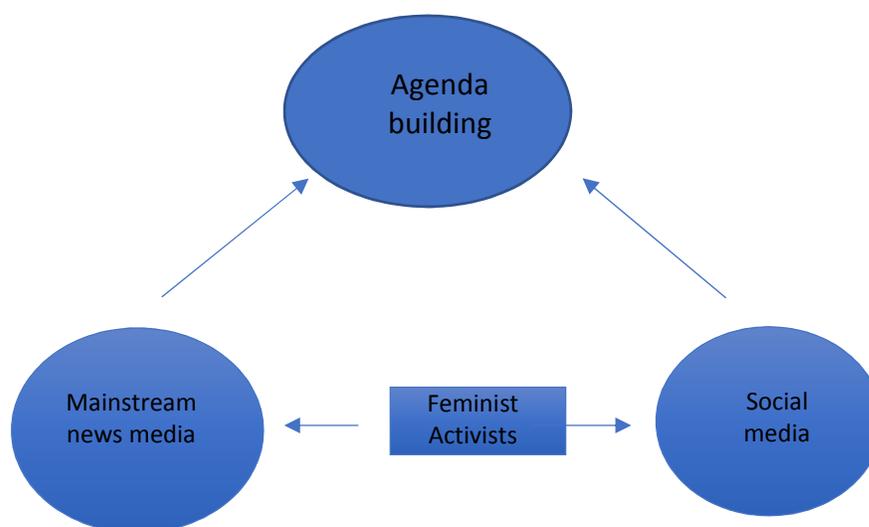


Figure 14 Interdependent agenda building model

To demonstrate how interdependent agenda building can work in the context of feminist digital activism in a digitally emerging country like India, I will discuss two cases of 2017: one, the molestation of more than fifteen women on New Years' Eve in Bangalore; and the other a case of sexual harassment involving the CEO of a digital production organization. Analyzing these two cases provides insights into how information about sexual assault and harassment incidents is disseminated to the public, law enforcement and policymakers, as well as citizen engagement on such incidents. Right now, there is a gap in the exchange of information among journalists, activists, policymakers and the public on issues of rape and sexual assault. As discussed in the previous chapters, similar examples of rape and sexual assault do not result in similar levels of public outrage and political action: convictions don't take place in all rapes, molestations and sexual assault allegations; justice is not delivered in all rapes, molestations and sexual assault allegations; and the conviction rate for rape and sexual assault is only 29% in

India. But when social media platforms and mainstream news media made a combined effort to report on an incident, there were swift actions against the perpetrators, as in the molestation of a American tourist in Mumbai in August of 2015.

On December 31, 2016, at least fifteen women were sexually harassed on the streets of Bangalore during the New Year's Eve celebration. There was no official confirmation of the number of women who were harassed. The unofficial number came from some of the harassed women and their friends, who decided to write about their ordeal on their personal Facebook pages. These were shared by feminist groups on their pages and in a few days, they became viral. Chaitali Wasnik, a wedding photographer, who was groped and molested, wrote on her Facebook page that the cops did nothing to help her but she kicked and punched the perpetrator. She did not mention later if she filed a formal police complaint. The police reported to the media that no complaints were filed against any perpetrators. However, after the initial reports started becoming public, the police and some of the elected ministers of the city rejected the claims of the women who were molested. The mainstream news media covered the news of molestations only on January 4, 2017, 4 days after the mass molestations.

What is important here is that the police and political leadership did not acknowledge the harassment, let alone act on the allegations. The police did not open a case, file any First Information Report (F.I.R.), or even check the close circuit television (CCTV) footage to verify the claims of the women immediately after the incident. The first complaint was filed after four days, with the publication of news in the media. In fact, instead of asking the police to investigate the matter, one political leader of the ruling party of Karnataka, a southern state, indulged in a blame-game by accusing the women of having loose morals, and following a western lifestyle of going to clubs and pubs late at night (Times News Network, 2017). The

political leaders from the government and the opposition dismissed the social media allegations and the subsequent outrage in the social media platforms. Demanding a full-blown investigation based on social media allegations could be a stretch, but neither is outright dismissal justified. There are other ways of verifying the claims, which is what the law enforcement eventually did; checking the CCTV in the public places where the molestations happened.

Finally, after a week, when mainstream television and newspapers started reporting the incident by publishing photographs of the molestations, the perpetrators, and partial photographs of the victims with the police, along with eyewitness accounts from Facebook posts and editorial columns by activists, the police became active and started responding to the allegations of molestation made by the women. The mainstream news media covered the mass molestation in detail and even interviewed some of the molestation survivors. This consistent reporting by the mainstream media on the incident forced the police to act and identify the perpetrators via closed circuit television footage. The interdependent connection between social and mainstream media helped the activists and victims to make a case against the perpetrators.

In the second case, a 24-year-old woman wrote a blog under the pseudo India's Fowler, accusing Arunabh Kumar, the CEO of a production company TVF (The Viral Fever) in India, of sexual harassment and intimidation. The blog was published by *Medium*, a blog site that publishes original content, on March 12, 2017. On March 14, 2017, most leading newspapers started reporting on the matter. The publication of the blog in the newspapers encouraged other women employees of TVF (The Viral Fever)⁴¹, who had also been harassed by the same CEO, to

⁴¹ The Viral Fever, is an online entertainment network, which started its operation in 2011. In 2014, Google funded this venture under its creator's innovation program (Julka, 2016). Arunabh Kumar founded this start-up along with Prashant Raj.

come forward. Some posted their experiences on their Facebook pages, others anonymously commented on the original blog post.

A leading English news channel in India, New Delhi Television Limited, popularly known as [NDTV, reported](#) that 50 women sent direct messages to a particular Twitter handle sharing their harassment by Mr . Kumar. This Twitter handle, which has been locked since April, had shared the first blog post by India's Fowler. Meanwhile, the accused CEO and the production company denounced the claim of the woman (India's Fowler) on their Twitter feeds and Facebook pages. The production company TVF released the first statement defending the CEO as a member of their team, claiming:

The article is completely ludicrous and defamatory against TVF (The Viral Fever) and its team. All the allegations made against TVF and its team in the article are categorically false, baseless and unverified.... We will leave no stone unturned to find the author of the article and bring them to severe justice for making such false allegations (TVF, March 2013).

The blog published on Medium under the pseudonym India's Fowler was shared by other online news websites such as Quartz, Mashable, Newsminute and others. Other than the 50 women who shared their ordeal through a direct message to the Twitter handle, two other women, Reema Sengupta and Reshma Patra, wrote Facebook posts supporting the allegations of India's Fowler and alleging similar harassment by Arunabh Kumar (Bhattacharya, 2017). Their Facebook posts were widely shared and within two days the mainstream media started reporting on the case, and the narrative to demand action started building up through editorials, reports and parallel social media outrage. Of course, the fact that the blog was written anonymously gave many the ammunition to doubt its authenticity. The mainstream media specifically mentioned in the coverage that the accuracy of the original post by India's Fowler was not possible to verify and the news media did not interview any of the 50 women who alleged harassment by Kumar.

Some of the women identified themselves publicly by posting on their Facebook pages with personal details such as their first and last name, photograph and profession. However, while all the news articles I have read on the accusations against Kumar had screengrabs of these women, none of them had an interview or quote from one of the identified women, despite the ease of contacting them via Facebook message.

Within a week, the mainstream news media covered the case prominently and consistently, as most leading English newspapers covered the allegation of sexual harassment. The general trends initially focused on the allegations made by India's Fowler and the existence of workplace harassment in organizations, including start-ups. Other than the news media coverage, there was also social media outrage, including outrage from feminists and feminist activists, which forced the production company to tone down its initial response and issue a second statement to a leading newspaper in India, *Daily News Analysis* on March 17, 2017. The following is an excerpt from this press statement demonstrating the shift in tone from dismissing the molestation accusation to agreeing to set up a committee:

We did send out an instant response, which may have been a bit too quick & emotional (*sic*). We recognize that we should have handled that response better. However, it is a fact that we have found no records of any such person on our payroll, in that given time-period, as described in the blog. Even as we were dealing with the first episode, several other allegations surfaced soon thereafter. Please know that we are sincerely looking into each one of them. We are committed to getting to the bottom of these allegations. Many of you have asked so we would like to confirm that yes, we have an ICC Committee set up in each location. (Corporate Communication Team, TVF, March 2017)

After the sexual harassment cases became public, a lawyer filed a third-party police complaint against Kumar. Third-party police complaints can be filed by any individual or organization other than the victim/complainant (Kalkod, 2010).

In both incidents, the mass molestation on New Year's Eve and the TVF sexual harassment and intimidation case, the police acted only after the incidents received mainstream

media coverage. Of course, social media platforms created space for the women to write about their harassment, but the information of harassment did not make its way to the public until mainstream media covered the issues. The law-enforcement or police did not publicly appeal through the media to the victims to register their complaint against the perpetrators. This step could have encouraged more women to file complaints of molestation and sexual assault but it happened when some women came forward. An appeal from the law enforcement would have encouraged more women to come forward and register their complaint.

In the past few years, journalists have been making a concerted effort to locate stories on social media sites, however verifying the stories through social media sites remains a challenge since many on social media have pseudo accounts and tracing back to the original source of information is difficult. In the interviews, veteran journalists suggested that sources from social media sites should be in addition to the groundwork that journalists do on stories. Younger journalists tend to get information from social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook but do not always verify the claims or information shared on these platforms. Shared content including video, memes and images on these social media platforms are sometimes created by the users, and it becomes difficult to distinguish if they are real or recreated.

Later in this chapter, I will show that during the interviews journalists also agreed that it is difficult and time consuming to verify information from social media sites.

The impact of interdependent agenda building and a bottom-up approach on feminist digital activism

Feminist research discusses the need to combine online and offline activities to bolster digital feminist activism (Mann, 2014). The interdependent agenda building approach that I propose is based on a similar stance of combining online and offline activities of feminist

activists, in which information from social media networks merges with traditional mass media to reach an increased number of people and thereby reinforce agenda building efforts.

Participants in Harlow and Guo's (2014) study described the Internet's ability to reach a mass audience, instantly making digital technologies efficient for sending messages or raising awareness. The participants of Harlow and Guo's study were immigrant activists from Austin (Texas). One of their participants said:

Digital tools provide greater access for more people to participate: social media is conducive to staying engaged with a cause from a distance.... Maybe it creates access for people who don't have the time and energy to devote hours of their week to it. Nevertheless, oftentimes many people who engage with a cause online will not go to the march offline. (pp. 470)

This observation of digital tools giving space to people to get involved in activism holds true in the case of feminist activism in India, where there is a consistent backlash against feminist activists. On the one hand, the Internet gives feminist activists a space to network and build feminist activism, but without the support of the mainstream media, feminist activists are limited when they try to reach mass audiences of the public and policy makers since India is still an emerging digital space with limited access to digital platforms. Gapova (2014) theorizes that the visibility of digital media (social networks, blogs, text messaging, etc.) creates space to promote and assist feminist activism. On rape and feminist activism, scholars write that social media platforms such as Twitter are useful in sharing information (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015; Eagle, 2015). But whether digital activism is sufficient to involve the masses remains open to question.

Rentschler and Thrift (2015) posited that Twitter has specifically aided in promoting rape prevention, peer-to-peer advice and in broadcasting feminist ideas including satire:

Rape Crisis Scotland's humorous 2012 campaign Top Ten Tips to End Rape, re-tweeted with #safetytipsforladies, telling men how not to rape by, among other things, advising men to carry whistles to warn potential victims. While presented jokingly, the campaign

nonetheless models how to make potential rapists responsible for their behavior. (pp. 354)

Twitter posts from around the world and international accounts such as *The Everyday Sexism Project* and *Stop Street Harassment* engage with the global reality of restrictions on women's mobility in public spaces in general and on public transport, irrespective of "the binaries of free/Western and oppressed/non-Western women" (Eagle, 2015). The anti-street harassment movement has become transnational, in which the safety of women is the main focus, irrespective of their geographical location. I follow their Facebook page keenly, where posts on street harassment are shared by women from the USA, the UK, Mexico, India, Portugal, Spain, Kenya and other countries.

Eagle (2015) claims that visuals are more effective when they are combined with text to promote a message on the digital platform. For instance, when memes, images and videos are shared on Facebook and Twitter, they create an effective message. Eagle also studied the "everyday sexism" project in India to stop street harassment; the photographs from the project highlighted the plight of women who deal with street harassment on a regular basis. Eagle writes:

The photos garnered tweets and retweets, followed by a hashtag discussion on Twitter about why #IndiaNeedsFeminism. Hashtag activism is part of the important work of awareness-raising, contributing to a larger conversation about eve-teasing—a practice that, with silence, is allowed to continue unquestioned and under the guise of simply being a part of the culture. (p. 351)

Ironically, when women of color in the United States face sexual assault and harassments, mass media coverage is negligible; minority women are devalued through the relative invisibility or minimization of their experiences of rape victimization (Ardovini-Brooker & Caringella-Macdonald, 2002). Perhaps they are considered less reliable and their story of lesser importance. When women in non-Western countries face sexual assault and harassments, they are highlighted in the mass media. In such situations, social media platforms can be an

egalitarian platform for discussions on rape and sexual assault. Rapp, et al. (2010), studying the use of online tools by black feminists, focused on an anti-rape protest in 2007 after a woman of color was raped and sodomized by four African-American males in the impoverished Dunbar village in Palm Beach, Florida. However, the incident received little media or political attention. In a report drafted for the Thirteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice⁴², Rosemary Barberet writes about how black feminists use the Internet, cutting across class inequalities. The report cites Rapp et al. (2010) in pp. 5:

As more low-income citizens gain access to the web, then it is expected that the Internet will become an ever more popular space for consciousness raising and social protest. Given the level of misinformation and distorted myths surrounding violence against women in general and regarding the rape of Black women in particular, an active Black feminist online community holds important possibilities.

This is plausible now that social media networks have become a massive platform for activists. Again, social media networks and the Internet provide a beneficial platform for connecting and establishing activism, but the use of mainstream mass media platforms is necessary to reach people without Internet access and strengthen the message to policymakers. The thematic analysis of the newspaper coverage of the three rapes and murders points out that Jyoti Singh Pandey and Jisha's rape and murder happened when social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter were active and influenced some coverage. Both rapes were brutal and resulted in murder; but the incidents did not get equal attention and coverage, both in terms of quantity and quality.

In Jyoti Singh Pandey's case, there was a proliferation in coverage of Pandey's rape and murder in the mainstream media and a sustained public campaign on various social media

⁴² The Thirteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice was held in Doha, Qatar from April 12 to April 19, 2015.

platforms to protest against rape and sexual assault and demand swift justice. The feminist activists simultaneously used both news media and social media platforms, and the mainstream media also used both content from feminist pages on Facebook and Twitter handles in an effort to build the agenda. This interdependence between the mainstream media and social media platforms was absent in the case of the attack on Jisha. Although feminist activists used social media platforms such as Facebook to build an agenda against the rape of Dalit women, the mainstream media did not respond similarly. Fewer articles were published on Jisha's rape and murder, and in terms of quality, the incident became a political spectacle and part of political news coverage. As outlined in the previous chapter, Jisha's rape became part of a campaign rhetoric, where opposition parties focused on the inefficiency of the then government. Rapes and sexual assault should not only be discussed as part of a political campaign, there should be sustained and consistent coverage of violence against women in India. Most political parties do not include violence against women in their election manifesto or on campaign websites and candidate pamphlets. Jisha's rape became a campaign spectacle but no new training programs were initiated by the new government after the election, nor was anything done to make public spaces safer for women. In a digitally emerging country like India, it is important for feminist activists to simultaneously build their agenda on social media platforms and in the mainstream media.

Policymakers and the public still depend on the media coverage in India to participate in the agenda building process (Hukil, 2013; Srinivasan, 2012). Social media sites have also created their own space to build agenda on important issues and some citizens participate in agenda building on social media platforms (Jaishankar, 2016). This indicates that interdependent agenda building is needed more now than ever before.

Summary of findings

I gathered data from three sources: interviews, published news reports of three cases of rape and sexual violence ranging from 2005-2016, and social media analysis of three feminist activism pages on Facebook.

The interviews with the feminist activists and the journalists indicated a paradoxical relationship between the two groups in India. The dichotomy of distrust and reliance between urban feminist activists and journalists, and subaltern feminist activists and journalists, indicates a disparity in the reporting on rape and sexual assault incidents and the building of a public agenda on the issue. On the one hand, there is a trust deficit between urban feminist activists and journalists about the coverage of rape and sexual assault incidents, on the other hand, subaltern feminist activists in urban and rural areas of India have a strong network with journalists, which helps them to exchange information on rape and sexual assault.

The thematic analysis of news reporting of the three incidents of the rape and murder of Pratibha Murthy (2005); Jyoti Singh Pandey (2012) and Jisha (2016) indicated that the location of the incident played a very important role in the quality and quantity of the coverage any rape incident gets from the mainstream media. Other important factors that influence rape coverage include caste, class, political agenda, public agenda, feminist activism and to an extent social media platforms. Whenever there is an incident or rape in a metro city or close to the city, there is an increase in media focus and coverage. Rape coverage is also politicized, the opposition parties take the opportunity to stir a campaign against the party in power, which is an universal trend. Most participants agreed it dilutes the coverage and shifts the attention from the incident.

Finally, analyzing the Facebook posts of anti-rape activist organizations on the rape and murder of Jyoti Singh Pandey and Jisha, indicated selective outrage and social media campaigns

depending on the how much netizens identified themselves with the victims and the incident. Facebook reported in July 2017 that India has the greatest number of Facebook users in the world, surpassing the United States (PTI, 2017). India is the second most populous country in the world, so it is not surprising that it would have the most Facebook users, considering the platform is banned in China, the most populated country in the world. The percentage of people with digital access in India is still low at 30% (TRAI) and about 47.6% of people with internet connection have a narrowband or slow connection speed (Krishnan, 2017). The Facebook user base is still male-dominated, where three-quarters of the total users are men (PTI, 2017). Twenty-four percent of Facebook users in India are women and most of them are from cities (Singh, 2017), therefore any incident in a city or other urban location generates more engagement and outrage in the social media platforms. Limitations in access, language, and digital literacy lead to gatekeeping of social media platforms, where the voice of the marginalized remains muted. The two main issues raised in these findings, of *gatekeeping* and the *gap between media platforms*, will be discussed further below.

Gatekeeping: In this study, a recurring theme was that of gatekeeping of anti-rape activism in rural areas by activists, journalists, and policymakers in urban areas. In Chapter 4, I discussed gatekeeping in the analysis of the interviews with the activists and journalists. This gatekeeping of subaltern feminist activists, or other activists and field workers in rural areas, has been documented in the past through the book *Playing with Fire* (Sangtin writers collective & Richa Nagar, 2005), and Srila Roy's (2015) research on feminist activism in Kolkata. Gatekeeping of resources by the urban and more powerful feminist activists creates issues of inequality between activists, where rural and other subaltern feminist activists do not have access to resources for their field work.

I was also denied access to some of the activists and field work, as I have discussed in detail in chapters three and four. The study unearthed through interviews that the subaltern activists were also stopped from protesting against the urban nonprofits. One of the participants cited an incident near her village, where a nonprofit senior official sexually harassed a female grassroots worker. When her colleagues protested and a local feminist newspaper reported the incident, there was a strong backlash from the organization. On the behest of the senior official, the nonprofit expelled the female grassroots worker and others who supported her. Nonprofit workers are sometimes dissatisfied with the existing discrimination in the organization. More recently, one of the feminist activist participants left the organization due to this gatekeeping and hierarchy, where money is spent on five-star accommodation for the nonprofit executive leadership but field workers are denied the resources they need. She said on condition of anonymity:

My organization doesn't want to work on sensitive issues such as brothel eviction because these have become political over the years and getting their hands dirty with these issues would mean getting into fisticuffs with the government. Monies are spent to appease the government and stakeholders or for the luxury of employees (*sic*).

Essentially, there is gatekeeping at all levels, by people, platforms, and organizations. The previous example was that of people and organizational gatekeeping. There are other forms of gatekeeping, such as corporate and technology, since technology is not available equitably to everyone (Kahn & Kellner, 2012). The Internet provides a space for marginalized groups to voice their opinions and construct their activism – “groups and individuals excluded from mainstream politics and cultural production of internet technopolitics and culture” (Kahn & Kellner, 2012, p. 600). However, the authors also add that it would be naïve to assume that the Internet is just a democratic and participatory platform, it also has a robust commercial and economic function. Digital activists need to tread the path of commercial and technological

gatekeeping judiciously. Finally, social media networking tools aid and support activism efforts, but do not replace the actual activism. Harlow & Harp (2012) did an exploratory study on the impact of social networking sites on online and offline activism. The results suggested that despite the digital divide, activists considered the Internet platforms like Facebook and Twitter favorably. However, it should not be assumed that these digital tools are replacing the traditional offline strategies. The authors proposed that the online and offline actions need to be combined to achieve real social change.

Recently, there was news that Facebook will use artificial intelligence (AI), which is “The science and engineering of making intelligent machines, especially intelligent computer programs” (AISB). Artificial intelligence is making a computer, a computer-controlled robot, or software, think and perform jobs that humans can do (AISB), for example, to block images of gruesome terrorist attacks (Facebook press release, 2017). But who will differentiate between a terrorist attack and an attack by security forces? One of the feminist activists mentioned that Facebook removed a sexual harassment image of a few boys harassing a girl (by pulling the *dupatta*⁴³ of the girl) from their organization’s Facebook page because it was flagged under nudity, despite the fact there was no nudity in the image. One of the victim’s friends took the picture on her cellphone and then went to Red Brigade to seek help. If AI controls the images published on Facebook, then how will images from such incidents reach the people? There is an inconsistency in the capacity of social networks to make any incident go viral. Not all movements are successful; social network issues rise and fall. Pandey’s rape and murder gained momentum on social media, but the recent rape and murder of a 16-year-old girl in Shimla, a northern state in India did not garner that outrage (Times News Network, 2017). The girl was

⁴³ Dupatta is an Indian scarf worn with the Indian dress of salwar kameez.

returning home from school when she was grabbed by two men, raped, and murdered (Times News Network, 2017). There were multiple reports in newspapers on the incident and protests in the town of Shimla over the next few weeks. But neither the activists, celebrities, nor anyone else transformed this into a social media campaign—or any other kind of campaign. I speculate that since the rape and murder happened in a small town, which was not going through an election or campaign cycle, there was little campaigning or sustained media coverage of the rape and murder. What merits a campaign has been debated, and that is also the focus of this study. Rape and sexual assault news tends to slip between the gaps of mainstream media and social media platforms.

The interdependent agenda building approach is based on the principle of not replacing the traditional mass media with the digital media or *vice versa*, but coalescing their information sharing and building efforts simultaneously to influence the public and the policymakers. I believe the agenda building initiatives on social media platforms will not annihilate mainstream mass media agenda building, instead it will support it. There needs to be more research on this newly emerging concept of “interdependent agenda building.” An alliance between social media networks and traditional mass media will enhance activism efforts related to rape and sexual assault. However, there is a need for additional data from global media platforms and social media networks for further research on the concept of the interdependent agenda building approach.

Gaps between media platforms: Past studies have shown that the media sets an agenda for the public (McCombs, 2015). In recent studies, there has been a focus on the agenda building capacity of new media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs (Mesner, 2010). Media platforms have different audiences and depending on their audience, the platforms present and

focus on the news in different ways (Schröder, 2015). Often media platforms neglect certain communities while catering to different audiences, specifically the marginalized communities (Rodriguez & Ofori, 2001). Chinmay, a journalist working for the past 25 years for various English newspapers, reiterates similarly:

Journalists focus on the news that audiences would be interested in and not what is important. English newspapers and television channels in India cater to the urban population, who are interested mostly in news related to them. So, rape and sexual violence that happens in a city or closer to a city gets a lot of coverage in English press. There are countless cases like that of Jyoti Singh Pandey, which have happened and they are still happening in Tamil Nadu, but no one sheds a tear for them.

There are no candlelight marches or other protest marches for these victims, they are not celebrated and no one takes up their cause. Chinmay goes on to say:

Sometimes we write about them but they don't get the same prominence as other cases. No one writes posts on them neither do they post Facebook messages nor hashtags are created for them. And often there are no follow ups in these cases, eventually they get lost in the news cycle and from public memory.

It's part of a global issue with news coverage in general, that marginalized populations don't get as much coverage as the majority. Anti-rape activists in rural areas work relentlessly without public or political acknowledgment, hence they must work with greater force. Rural feminist activists also face the most resistance and gatekeeping from policymakers, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, and renowned activists. One of the rural based feminist activists said, "We want to apply for funding for our activism but we have neither the resources nor the help from activist groups for whom we do workshops." Another rural anti-rape activism group, Red Brigade, based in Lucknow, had to hire a digital strategist to help them manage their online activism. Their Facebook page had previously been deleted for posting photographs of a molestation incident, but they have now hired a professional digital strategist for their digital

communication and advocacy. Figure 2 below is an example of the content they now share on their Facebook page:



Figure 15 Facebook page of Red Brigade

In this study, I focused on whose stories get on to social media or mass media platforms. In the process, I learned that not everyone's story gets the same kind of attention, whether in mainstream media or social media. Even the international media focuses on the stories that have already been amplified in the social media and domestic media; further focusing on the same rapes and sexual assault and neglecting the others. While I was writing this chapter, there was news of a gang-rape victim from Uttar Pradesh being attacked for the fourth time with acid in July 2017. She was previously attacked by rapists in March 2017 on a moving train (Times News Network, 2017a). She was gang-raped in 2008 in her village over a property dispute and was physically attacked in 2011 and in 2013 (Indian express news desk, 2017). But her repeated physical and acid attacks did not merit any social media or hashtag movements. Although it was covered in detail by the English and regional news media across all platforms, it was not addressed by the policymakers in the State Assembly or by the minister by asking law enforcement to take swift action against the perpetrators. Nor was there any protest or outrage by the public to influence the political leaders to take action. I can only speculate that since the victim was raped and assaulted over and over again in a smaller city, her ordeal was not "important enough" for a social media campaign and slipped through the gap between news media and social media.

Despite this incident having taken place in the interior of the country, it has surprisingly received a lot of attention from the mass media. One of the reasons could be the repeated attacks on the victim and her resilience. Another reason could be political. The state of Uttar Pradesh recently held state level elections (known as assembly elections in India) and the victim met the newly elected Chief Minister in March 2017 after she was attacked the third time (NDTV, 2017). From the data gathered in this study, I assume that the mass media treated this as political news.

Sanjib, a Mumbai-based multiplatform journalist said, “Rape incidents are covered by political and crime beat journalists. Then, depending on the nature of the case, it gets assigned to female journalists.” Hitendra and Pratap, both Delhi-based journalists with 30 years of experience, agree with Sanjib that rape issues often become political. Political leaders use rape and sexual assault incidents as campaign rhetoric and get involved in blaming the government in power, which is covered by the media. Instead of showing leadership by creating policies or creating mandatory training programs for law enforcement officials, political leaders always take the opportunity to campaign against the opposing parties. They fail to “turn the searchlight inwards,” as Mahatma Gandhi said.

Some studies have cited that rape becomes a part of a political narrative in the media (Hirschauer, 2014). Other researchers have established a relationship between high profile sex-crimes, political agendas, and news (Coulter & Meyer, 2015). This is also evident from some of the news reports published after Jyoti Singh Pandey’s rape and subsequent death which equated rape and violence against women as a political news story: “Law-makers who have been shedding tears over the Delhi gang rape do not match their words with action. While MPs and MLAs of all political hues demanded death penalty for the accused....” (Dhawani, 2012).

A recent article in the *Times of India*, written by Pradeep Thakuri on June 24, 2017, concentrated on the plight of rape victims in India. Headlined, *5 years on, it’s the same ordeal for Nirbhayas*, the news article described the challenges faced by rape survivors and victims in the capital city of Delhi. What is fascinating in this article is the consistent focus on the status quo of the system for victims of sexual violence and survivors, the absence of rape crisis centers, resistance in filing First Response Reports, and other legal and medical issues still being persistent. Although Thakuri did not venture into the watershed moments of the protests and

policy changes that happened after Nirbhaya's rape and murder, or the fact that even after five years the harassment continues, the author does accept that the 2012 Delhi gang rape case was a milestone. Scholars and journalists (Jolly, 2016; Dey, 2014; Danish, 2013; Udas, 2013) also agree that the 2012 Delhi gang rape case is a watershed moment because of the policy changes in rape and sexual harassment laws achieved through the implementation of the Justice Verma Commission recommendations.

The perils of media silos

From 2011 to 2013, globally, there was a rise in various social and political movements, such as the #OccupyWallstreet, the anti-corruption movement, and the anti-street harassment movement, and scholars, activists and journalists credited the rise of social and political movements to social media platforms. Whether it was the Arab Spring or #OccupyWallStreet, the Ukrainian Protest, the Indian anti-corruption protest, or others, the buzz word was social media protests. However, the activists who spearheaded these movements are gradually coming to terms with the challenges of social media activism. Wael Ghonim, the activist who started the Arab Spring, shared his experience in a TED talk in 2016 about the internet. He was cynical about it, "I once said, 'If you want to liberate a society, all you need is an internet.' I was wrong... the same tool that united us to topple dictatorship eventually tore us apart."

Why the sudden cynicism about the tool, which until recently was viewed as the savior of marginalized and oppressed communities? Other feminist writers and activists such as Lindy West are increasingly identifying the challenges and concerns of social media activism. In an opinion piece for *The Guardian*, published on January 3, 2017, headlined, *I've Left Twitter. It is Unusable for Anyone but Trolls, Robots and Dictators*, Lindy West wrote about the dichotomy of Twitter as a seemingly democratic space for marginalized population and the platform's inability

to restrain trolls and hate speech. Increasing abuse and threats on Twitter compelled West to leave the platform, but in her article, she made an interesting analogy:

If my gynaecologist regularly hosted neo-Nazi rallies in the exam room, I would find someone else to swab my cervix. If I found out my favourite coffee shop was even remotely complicit in the third world war, I would – bare minimum – switch coffee shops; I might give up coffee altogether. (West, 2017)

Activists and citizens are increasingly discussing the pitfalls of social media activism. In the context of the standing rock digital activism, Amanda Jones for *HuffPost* wrote about the superficiality of the exercise:

Sure, it is great for garnering attention about an issue (which is important), but it is ultimately just fads that suddenly boom in popularity but die out as quickly as they appear. People mindlessly join in before swiftly moving on to the next campaign in vogue and abandoning the previous one. (Jones, 2016)

Harry Cheadle, in his article published on January 7, 2017, in *VICE*, also identified the issues both Twitter and Facebook are grappling with:

Facebook is filled with fake news stories and hoaxes, and its latest feature, Facebook Live, most recently captured a horrific alleged hate crime. Nearly everything you read on social media—down to even a "liberal tears" mug that was promoted all over Twitter last month—is somehow a lie.

What we are now experiencing is the dark side of citizen empowerment; tools and platforms which were once perceived as positive now have both positive and negative consequences. It undermines the positive framing of the social media platforms. Wael Ghonim identifies the following issues of social media activism in his TED talk of 2016:

- We don't know how to deal with rumors – they spread too fast
- We tend to only communicate with people that we agree with
- Online discussions quickly descend into angry mobs
- We are forced to jump to conclusions
- Our digital experiences favor broadcasting over engagement, posts over discussions
- We talk at, not with

Ghonim identified multiple issues with social media based activism; the tendency to communicate in silos, which Eli Pariser has described as *filter bubble* in his research (2011). Other studies have identified the same thing; that people, not social media platforms, organize people. There is no denying that social media platforms are important tools, but they are supplemental tools to organize activism and not the main platform. This needs to be understood by both activists and citizens, along with the gap between awareness and action.

In this study, both journalists and activists agreed that citizens were aware of what was happening and even participating by sharing news links, memes, hashtags, and other media, but even they wondered if the citizens were able to send across a strong message of activism through their participation in social media platforms. They questioned how many took concrete action to influence the mass media and other stakeholders to bring about a change.

Scholars and activists are increasingly starting to recognize the issues of dependence on social media platforms for activism. Some of these issues helped me to structure the recommendation of this study, and as an outcome to create an app which could be used by both feminist activists and journalists to bridge the existing gap between rape incidents and reporting.

Activists have identified trolling and silos as some of the issues with social media activism, but how do academics define the issues? Mihailidis (2017) identified three issues in activism and social media platforms:

1. *Spectacle*: Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and others are no longer open platforms but are highly commodified (Mihalidis, 2016; Meijias, 2013). The algorithm design and insistence of payment to promote Facebook pages are some of the examples of commercialization. They also promote spectacle through the filters, which can only be used by individuals and activists who have a higher skill level of navigating

the platforms. Filters are visual enhancements used in social media platforms to create memes and other visual content and generate engagement with the audience. In the context of this dissertation, many subaltern feminist activists in India do not have such skills, thus failing to create a spectacle and getting the attention of the mass media. The dependence of mass media on spectacle tends to take away the attention from the main issue. Social media platforms only work when spectacle is included in it. In the next segment, I will discuss how the app can be an independent platform for activists and journalists.

2. *Agency gap*: Activists and citizens experience a gap in influencing people; due to their dependence on the technologies, an action may be limited to hashtagging and slacktivism. “This emerging gap between awareness and action taking is perpetuated by a dependence on technologies to feel aware about civic issues, but without the ability to perceive pathways to meaningful engagement” (Mihailidis, 2017).

In a digitally emerging country like India, subaltern feminist activists may own smartphones and have access to digital media, but digital literacy is low. Consequently, creating mostly text content is a challenge for these activists. If they network with journalists, they can get their stories out. But as much as journalists want to tell their stories, other factors interfere, such as limited space for publication or breaking news. Here, social media platforms can be helpful in amplifying the stories and forcing the mainstream media to take note. This is where the interdependence of agenda building becomes important and necessary.

I was deeply inspired by Abraham Joshua Heschel’s (1963) thought, “morally speaking, there is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings, that indifference to evil is worse than evil itself, that in a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible.” My

responsibility lies in creating an outcome from all the interview and other data I collected. This inspired me to create a platform which would be helpful for both feminist activists and journalists in creating an interdependent agenda building model. The following section describes building the app and the factors that I took into consideration.

Recommendations - Mind the gap please

Eldridge Cleaver (1935 - 1998), an American author, famously said, “You are either part of the solution or part of the problem.” The whole idea of writing this dissertation was my desire to become a part of the solution, to create better interdependence of feminist activists and journalists to build an agenda on rape and sexual assault. I was also interested to create a tangible outcome for the rural activists. The focus on the rural feminist activist has been a significant outcome of this study.

I have no technical expertise in mobile application design and coding, and so, I relied on the *Design Thinking* theory of Civic Media (Gordon, 2017). Design Thinking is based on the idea of collaboration between individuals around a problem, who will then emerge with creative solutions (Johansson & Sköldbberg et al., 2013). According to Gordon (2017), the goal of Design Thinking, as stated by IDEO, is to take non-designers through a creative problem-solving process and produce positive results, with more usable tools and processes. Based on the idea of Design Thinking, I created a mobile application which is focused on the community outcome of supporting anti-rape feminist activists. Products which are created by the values of equity, relation, trust and care make community based applications useful (Gordon, 2017). Civic Design begins by inviting participants to define values and issues that matter. I asked my participants what values and issues mattered the most to them when they were building an agenda against rape. The majority said they were most interested in building a public agenda and hoped more

stories would find their way to the mainstream media. The most important value for them was trust and the dissemination of information about rape incidents to the public.

I tried to incorporate this value into the mobile application. An important aspect of Design Thinking is co-design, which is based on the fact that users and stakeholders collaborate with designers. I am hesitant to call this a co-design process because my participants did not physically participate in designing the app, but the app is based on the research data and I invited my participants to test it and suggest improvements.

I named the app Ekjut, which is a word used in Bengali, Hindi, Odiya and a few other Indian languages, meaning *together* and *united*. The purpose of this app is to encourage journalists and activists to work together in combating sexual assaults on women. The most important thing that I considered while creating this app is the need to create a private space for anti-rape feminist activists and journalists without commodifying the platform and creating a long list of rules and agreements, which might be difficult to follow. There was just one rule of not using strong or abusive language against any participant, which plays in an audio file in the language of choice of the user. I did not want to overlook issues of limited literacy, limited digital literacy, and multiple languages – India has around 300 languages. These concerns led me to use non-textual content in the app, to make it easier for any activist or journalist to share information, using image, voice, and video sharing. The app also protects the privacy of the user by not sharing the phone number or email with other users, unlike in WhatsApp or in Slack, as not all journalists and activists are known to each other. In particular, a majority of rural activists find it difficult to write or respond to emails. Journalists are not comfortable sharing their cell phone numbers publicly and this app gives them an easy to use method to obtain information

without sharing their number. The app has a password protected space, where activists can share information with journalists through text, voice recording, video recording or just images.

The home page gives a brief description of the app, so that it is credible for journalists and activists. It then has some pocket tools, which help users to record video or audio and shoot pictures. The final tab is *Know and Respond*, which is the password protected space. The user does not have to go back to the email to verify the link, but can log in with email and a password. The app is available at the link below for Android and iOS devices, but is not yet available for Blackberry and Windows devices:

Android: <http://d2wuvg8krwnvon.cloudfront.net/appfile/c62047c3a5fe.apk>

iOS: <https://snappy.appypie.com/app/generateplist/appId/c62047c3a5fe>

I have shared a few pictures of the application to demonstrate the various tools it offers and how it supports anti-rape feminist activism in Appendix 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

After launching the app, I shared it with my interview participants, but only a few activists and journalists tested the app and responded. As much as they were happy to use the app because it protected their cell phone numbers and at the same time let them share information on sexual assault, they were concerned about security. Since the app is not yet available in the App store and the Android store, devices automatically caution the user of an unverified source when they try to download the app. Some of the participants use cell phones provided by their organization and so were wary of downloading an unverified app.

There are some limitations to the design process, which I will discuss further in the next section. Design Thinking and its process tends to be product oriented, and does not embrace the ambiguity of activism (Gordon, 2017). This holds true in this case, but the app also presents

some solutions to real issues for the activists and there is potential to develop it further and use it as a tool for continuing research.

Other than the mobile application, I also recommend journalism practitioners and editors in India to create a transparent system of covering rape and sexual harassment. As most participants agreed that more than the brutality of the rape and sexual harassment, it is the social identification and characteristics of the victim and the perpetrator that becomes the deciding factor. Coverage of rapes and sexual harassments from rural India are as much needed as rapes and sexual harassments in urban India. Instead of placing the rapes and sexual harassment from rural India to the inside pages, covering all rapes and sexual harassments on page 1 and page 2 will help feminist activists to keep the conversation going and force the policymakers to take action.

Limitations

One of the limitations of the app is the vetting process. Although I created this app as a safe space for communication between feminist activists and journalists to trade notes and information on incidents of rape and sexual assault, there is no foolproof process to monitor the background of the participants and there is a thin line between vetting and gatekeeping. For instance, I did not want to block freelance journalists and standalone activists from joining the network, but I am still trying to develop a plausible approach to safeguard the network from individuals with false identities. This is a challenge and a limitation of the app.

Another potential limitation is in making the app credible enough for journalists and feminist activists to join. I tested the app with multiple individuals and they all agreed that there needs to be a substantive number of journalists on the platform for feminist activists to join the app, which will eventually create interdependent agenda building.

Finally, the app has been created in English. The next step is to have translation tools, so that activists can navigate and use the app in any language they want. Ideally, a voice translation would also resolve the issues of literacy, where the user can choose the language of their preference and the contents of the pages would be translated for the user.

The theories that I focused on were agenda setting, agenda building, and transnational feminism, all of which are based on the perspectives and experiences of the Global North. True, some of the experiences of women are universal, but the relationship between feminist activism, cyberfeminism and the news media depends on the social, political and cultural structure of the country. Scholarship from the Global South is negligible, and hence, I had to depend on the theoretical framework of the Global North. This is a potential limitation, since explaining the feminist activism and media coverage of rape and sexual assault in India in the existing framework could be a challenge. There has been some research on the media coverage of rape and sexual assault in India and its sociological impact done by scholars of Indian origin, but I did not find any theoretical frameworks pertaining specifically to the Global South. Although my intention was to decolonize the theoretical framework from the Global North, I could not achieve this, simply because the seminal theories were all focused on the northern location.

The study also lacks any comparative analysis. It focuses on Indian and English language newspapers. An ideal comparative analysis would include either another Asian democratic country, or another Indian language newspaper, and its coverage on rape and sexual assault.

I decided to choose the two most circulated English newspapers to draw my samples. India is a linguistically diverse country, where more than 300 languages are spoken in the country. English is the second most spoken language after Hindi in India. To distance myself from the politics of culture and language in the country, I decided to focus on English language

newspapers. There are undeniable limitations, including being focused on urban, elite newspapers, but this was the only way to understand a pan-Indian phenomenon. To offset this, I interviewed journalists and activists, who spoke and represented some of the other Indian languages. I restricted myself to the two most spoken languages in India, Hindi and Bengali, of which I am a native language speaker. I acknowledge that the southern part of the country is not well represented due to language issues.

While recruiting journalists and activists, I approached them through purposive and snowball sampling. The first set of participants were invited by email and the participants were subsequently requested to snowball the information to encourage others to participate in the study. While approaching the grassroots feminist activists, I encountered resistance from some of the established NGOs known to work on violence against women where there was an unmistakable social hierarchy which prevented me from interviewing grassroots activists. It was a situation well-articulated by a group of feminist activists in their book, *Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism Through Seven Lives in India* (Sangtin writers collective & Richa Nagar, 2005).

Social and political hierarchy is very rigid in India: even when nonprofits are working for the “uplift of women” from economically or socially disadvantaged classes, they maintain a system of hierarchy. One of the writers from the Sangtin writer’s collective mentions in her diary that the whole structure is created like a ladder; someone is higher than the other, even as the feminist activist organizations propagate equality. I also encountered this inequality during my recruitment. These women have the knowledge but their ownership of the knowledge and also their right to share it with others is being denied. The nonprofits, in trying to gather more funds and impress international donors, neglect the requirements of activism and reinforce the existing

social hierarchies. The grassroots activists are deemed inferior because of their caste, class and access to education (Nagar & Sangtin, 2005).

Another limitation of this study is the absence of religious and gender diversity in the activist participant profile. I reached out to male anti-rape feminist activists, but did not receive any response. So, it was not by design that I could not include more diverse participants. I still wonder whether the non-response was based on my gender and if a male researcher had approached the male anti-rape feminist activists, whether they would have responded. This reminds me of Connelly's work on research limitations, "Some limitations cannot be controlled by the researcher, some can be minimized, and some occur when the researcher tries to balance scientific rigor with realism" (Connelly, 2013, p. 336).

Future course of research

There is a diverse array of potential research topics on this issue. India has 29 states divided in four broad regions; North, South, East and West. A future study could be as specific as comparing the regions. It could also compare television news and print reporting on incidents of rape and sexual assault. It is important to understand the patterns of television coverage of rape and sexual assault. The visuals and the news frames used in television are different from newspapers. Finally, with over 22 official languages in India, a research project could examine how feminist activists engage with English media as compared to one or many Indian language media, providing an insight into the difference between the news frames and agenda of Indian and English language news media on what they perceive as important in rape and sexual assault.

There could be a comparative study of how feminist activists engage with the media in the neighboring countries of Pakistan, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh. The app could be put to the test in these countries and the results used to support the research findings. Since

the countries share a similar cultural and historical heritage, and women face a similar plight with the patriarchal oppression of the society, the results could provide an insight into the success and challenges of interdependent agenda building.

It will be interesting to note in future whether hashtag feminist activism can reach more people in India with the support of the Indian mainstream media and the mutual influence between international and domestic news media. It is now common in Indian newsrooms to report on social media trends and conversations. It would be interesting to see if feminist hashtags are equally represented and reported on by both the international and domestic news media. This could bring feminist campaigns to the mainstream, compelling policymakers and citizens to take notice and become more engaged. I urge feminist activists and the mainstream media to use the interdependent agenda building approach to engage the public.

I hope the findings of this study can create a greater interdependence between anti-rape feminist activists and journalists to build a public agenda and eventually change the public and political narrative on the issue by decreasing victim blaming. Political leaders and law enforcement still engage in victim blaming in rape and sexual assault. I hope to share my thesis with my participants, by translating this study into two more languages; which will be challenging.

Conclusion

Writing this dissertation has been a catharsis for me. I have met people who have candidly discussed their sexual exploitation, which is not often spoken of in public unless it is covered by the media. My study indicated that my assumption of the active role of the Indian mass media in the Indian feminist activism, and collaboration, was overvalued. Through the course of this research, I learned that what works in some countries may not work in the others

and that holds true for digital activism against rape and sexual harassment too. In any digitally emerging country, therefore, it is essential to focus on all forms of media to build a public agenda against rape and sexual assault. As a feminist media research scholar, the conversations with my participants were enlightening, and we decided to maintain our relationship beyond the research. I share a common interest in feminist activism with many, and this has strengthened our association. This study demonstrated how journalists and feminist activists interact, to influence the public agenda to build awareness of rape and sexual assault. The inclusion of the rural feminist activists in this study was enlightening because they gave a perspective different to the popularly shared version of feminist activism. This information was a significant finding which focused on the agenda build methods and capacities of rural feminist activists with limited to no-source and other challenges in the rural areas. Repeatedly, in this study, I came across the dominant theme of the mainstream media coverage of rape and sexual assault and use of social media platforms for anti-rape activism operating in silos. Other than urban-based rape and murder coverage, the public outrage, discussion, and impact on mainstream media and social media were underrated. Since 2013, in mainstream and social media, the increase in the police complaints against sexual assault and rapes in 2013, has been celebrated. Many has attributed this phenomenon to Pandey's rape and murder and the Criminal Act Amendment of 2013. However, it is not surprising to note that from 2015 onwards, the annual NCRB reports have shown a decline in the number of cases registered for rape, sexual assault, and molestation. The number of rape and sexual assault convictions have always been low, in 2013 and in 2016, due to the hastiness of the law enforcement officials to register and conclude the case. The media, public, and the policymakers repeatedly overlook this fact. There needs to be cohesion, and collaboration between mainstream news media and the social media groups to reduce the gap

between policies, to implement, and to understand the policies and making the public aware against rape and sexual assault.

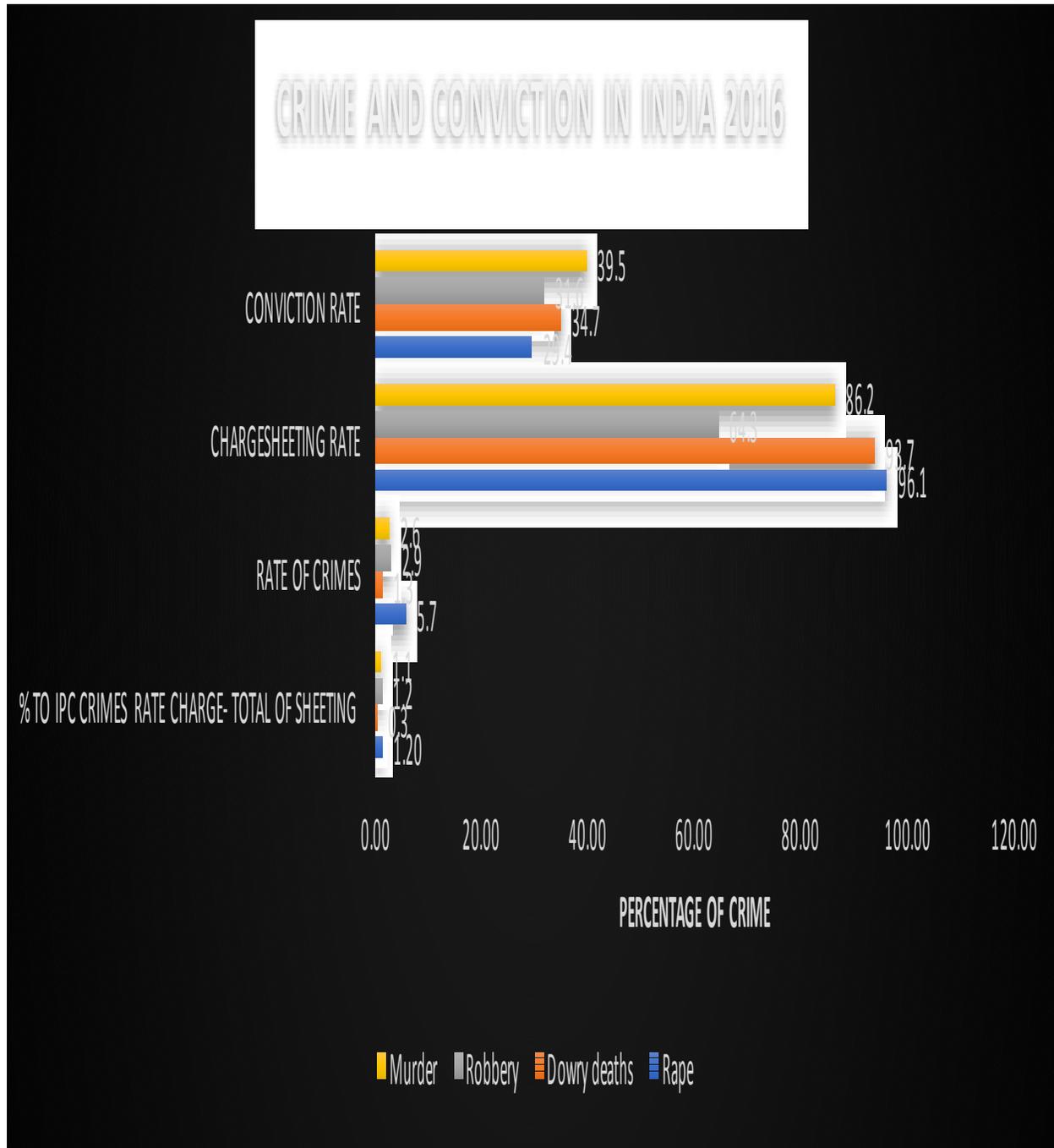
Finally, I would like to end with what Trinh T. Minh-ha said in 1983, in the context of her documentary, *Reassemblage*, “I do not intend to speak about. Just speak nearby.” Through this study, I do not intend to speak about the media engagement of anti-rape feminist activists in agenda building in India from a superior standing of a researcher, but rather, I will speak by being near the activists, the journalists, the culture and the situation and not impose my meaning on the participants.

Appendix 1: Map of India



Source: Maps of India

Appendix 2: Crime and conviction rate in India, 2016



Source: National Crime Research Bureau, 2017

Appendix

TABLE 5.2
Cases Reported (I), Victims(V) & Rate (R) of Crimes Committed Against Women During 2015 (Concluded)

S. No.	State/UT	Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act						Total Crimes Against Women		
		Under ITP Section 8			Other Sections of ITP Act			I	V	R
		I	V	R	I	V	R			
(1)	(2)	(115)	(116)	(117)	(118)	(119)	(120)	(121)	(122)	(123)
STATES:										
1	Andhra Pradesh	1	-	0.0	115	125	0.4	15931	16046	62.3
2	Arunachal Pradesh	0	-	0.0	2	2	0.3	384	392	62.1
3	Assam	0	-	0.0	10	10	0.1	23258	23271	148.2
4	Bihar	0	-	0.0	2	2	0.0	13891	14084	27.9
5	Chhattisgarh	0	-	0.0	4	4	0.0	5720	5760	44.8
6	Goa	0	-	0.0	3	4	0.3	365	374	39.9
7	Gujarat	4	-	0.0	7	7	0.0	7762	7817	26.3
8	Haryana	0	-	0.0	26	31	0.2	9446	9545	75.7
9	Himachal Pradesh	0	-	0.0	2	2	0.1	1289	1311	37.4
10	Jammu & Kashmir	0	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	3363	3367	57.0
11	Jharkhand	2	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	6518	6604	40.2
12	Karnataka	48	-	0.2	114	155	0.4	12705	13180	41.6
13	Kerala	63	-	0.3	44	48	0.2	9708	9718	53.4
14	Madhya Pradesh	0	-	0.0	8	12	0.0	24135	24297	65.5
15	Maharashtra	133	-	0.2	81	99	0.1	31126	31554	54.8
16	Manipur	0	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	266	278	20.8
17	Meghalaya	0	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	334	342	24.5
18	Mizoram	0	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	158	192	30.9
19	Nagaland	0	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	90	92	8.0
20	Odisha	0	-	0.0	24	24	0.1	17144	17193	81.9
21	Punjab	0	-	0.0	37	75	0.3	5291	5410	39.7
22	Rajasthan	0	-	0.0	63	90	0.2	28165	28237	81.5
23	Sikkim	0	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	53	55	17.6
24	Tamil Nadu	13	-	0.0	66	87	0.2	5847	6040	17.0
25	Telangana	0	-	0.0	37	37	0.2	15135	15212	83.1
26	Tripura	0	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	1267	1270	68.2
27	Uttar Pradesh	1	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	35527	35575	34.8
28	Uttarakhand	0	-	0.0	4	4	0.1	1453	1486	28.2
29	West Bengal	23	-	0.1	39	60	0.1	33218	33346	73.4
TOTAL STATE(S)		288	-	0.0	688	878	0.1	309549	312048	52.0
UNION TERRITORIES:										
30	A & N Islands	0	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	136	137	51.1
31	Chandigarh	0	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	463	469	64.8
32	D&N Haveli	0	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	25	25	12.9
33	Daman & Diu	0	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	28	30	26.4
34	Delhi UT	0	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	17104	17388	184.3
35	Lakshadweep	0	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	9	9	22.0
36	Puducherry	0	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	80	81	10.9
TOTAL UT(S)		0	-	0.0	0	0	0.0	17845	18139	157.4
TOTAL (ALL INDIA)		288	-	0.0	688	878	0.1	327394	330187	53.9

TABLE 5.2 - Page: 11 of 11

'I' - refers to Cases Reported; 'V' refers to No. of Victims in registered cases; 'R' refers to Crime Rate.

Col. 121 = Col. 4 + Col. 25 + Col. 28 + Col. 46+ Col. 49+ Col. 67 +Col. 82 + Col. 85 + Col. 88 + Col. 91+ Col. 94 + Col. 100 + Col. 103
Col. 122 = Col. 5 + Col. 26 + Col. 29 + Col. 47+ Col. 50+ Col. 68 +Col. 83 + Col. 86 + Col. 89 + Col. 92+ Col. 95 + Col. 101 + Col. 104

Appendix 3: Violence against women

TABLE 5.6 (Concluded)

S. No.	Crime Head	Cases in Which Trials were Completed (Col. 10+11)	Cases Convicted	Cases Acquitted or Discharged	Cases Pending Trial at the End of the Year (Col.7 - (Col.8+9))	Conviction Rate (Col.10/Col.9) x 100	Cases Pendency Percentage ((Col.12)/(Col.3+Col.4)) x 100
(1)	(2)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
CRIME HEAD:							
1	Rape	18764	5514	13250	118520	29.4	86.2
1.1	Custodial Rape	28	11	17	219	39.3	88.7
1.1.1	Custodial_Gang Rape	1	1	0	6	100.0	85.7
1.1.2	Custodial_Other Rape	27	10	17	213	37.0	88.8
1.2	Rape other than Custodial	18736	5503	13233	118301	29.4	86.2
1.2.1	Rape_Gang Rape	560	230	330	3247	41.1	85.2
1.2.2	Rape_Others	18176	5273	12903	115054	29.0	86.2
2	Attempt to Commit Rape	1035	205	830	5886	19.8	84.8
3	Kidnapping & Abduction of Women	12879	3153	9726	110694	24.5	89.2
3.1	Kidnaping & Abduction	2774	701	2073	25955	25.3	90.1
3.2	Kidnaping & Abduction in Order to Murder	219	58	161	206	26.5	48.5
3.3	Kidnapping for Ransom	16	2	14	265	12.5	94.3
3.4	Kidnapping & Abduction of Women to Compel Her for Marriage	8120	1995	6125	66246	24.6	88.6
3.5	Kidnapping & Abduction of Women-Other	1750	397	1353	18022	22.7	90.9
4	Dowry Deaths	5165	1792	3373	37062	34.7	87.4
5	Assault on Women with intent to outrage her Modesty	34541	8408	26133	251482	24.3	86.3
5.1	Sexual Harassment	8423	2476	5947	50380	29.4	82.7
5.2	Assault on women with intent to Disrobe	1935	389	1546	11300	20.1	84.4
5.3	Voyeurism	209	90	119	1207	43.1	84.1
5.4	Stalking	1287	340	947	7650	26.4	84.2
5.5	Others	22687	5113	17574	180945	22.5	87.6
6	Insult to the Modesty of Women	3998	870	3128	30423	21.8	84.0
6.1	At Office Premises	36	5	31	223	13.9	85.4
6.2	In Places Related to Work	285	97	188	1353	34.0	75.3
6.3	In Public Transport System	56	10	46	566	17.9	85.6
6.4	in Other Places	3621	758	2863	28281	20.9	84.4
7	Cruelty by Husband or his Relatives	46127	6559	39568	477986	14.2	89.3
8	Importation of Girls from Foreign Country	9	4	5	193	44.4	95.5
9	Abetment of Suicides of Women	1340	193	1147	9951	14.4	87.9
10	Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	3212	595	2617	29667	18.5	88.3
11	Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986	137	44	93	704	32.1	83.6
12	Commission of Sati Prevention Act 1987	0	0	0	0	-	-
13	Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005	46	22	24	799	47.8	94.3
14	Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act	987	485	502	6777	49.1	87.2
14.1	Under Section 5	351	168	183	2183	47.9	86.1
14.2	Under Section 6	23	13	10	205	56.5	89.9
14.3	Under Section 7	47	27	20	625	57.4	93.0
14.4	Under Section 8	72	62	10	574	86.1	88.6
14.5	Other Sections under ITP Act	494	215	279	3190	43.5	86.5
Total Crimes against Women		128240	27844	100396	1080144	21.7	88.0

TABLE 5.6 - Page: 2 of 2

Appendix 4: Circulation of Indian Newspapers



AUDIT BUREAU OF CIRCULATIONS

Highest Circulated amongst ABC Member Publications (language wise)

Language	Publication / Title	Average Qualifying Sales Jul - Dec 2016	Average Qualifying Sales Jan - Jun 2016
Assamese	Asomiya Pratidin	146,431	159,126
	Asomiya Khabar	83,955	61,165
Bengali	Ananda Bazar Patrika	1,102,955	1,115,354
	Bartaman	649,586	650,129
	Ei Samay Sangbadpatra	270,018	251,849
English	The Times of India	3,184,727	2,731,334
	The Hindu	1,464,297	1,458,398
	Hindustan Times	1,194,816	1,071,466
	The Telegraph	466,001	464,588
	The Economic Times	390,316	384,412
Gujarati	Divya Bhaskar	724,734	719,532
	Mumbai Samachar	61,258	61,165
	Kutch Mitra	51,837	50,703
Hindi	Dainik Jagran	3,921,267	3,632,383
	Dainik Bhaskar	3,813,271	3,812,599
	Amar Ujala	2,961,833	2,938,173
	Hindustan	2,611,261	2,399,086
	Rajasthan Patrika	1,840,917	1,813,756
Kannada	Vijayavani	838,028	791,837
	Vijay Karnataka	700,039	685,001
	Prajavani	563,843	527,309
	Udayavani	323,400	301,316
Malayalam	Malayala Manorama	2,441,417	2,372,256
	Mathrubhumi	1,473,053	1,461,881
	Deshabhimani	409,698	293,776
Marathi	Daily Sakal	1,281,305	1,281,449
	Lokmat	941,695	Late Received Not Certified
	Pudhari	637,799	653,442
	Punya Nagari	479,292	467,342
Oriya	Prameya	423,582	393,146
	Samaj	330,074	327,485
Punjabi	Ajit	401,452	400,126
	Jag Bani	324,795	331,296
Tamil	Daily Thanthi	1,710,621	1,714,743
	Dinakaran	1,152,840	1,141,965
	Dinamalar	923,356	942,812
Telugu	Eenadu	1,866,661	1,841,276
	Sakshi	1,113,696	1,150,527
	Andhra Jyoti	657,706	615,361
Urdu	The Munsif	60,274	60,204
	The Siasat Daily	46,025	45,353

Appendix 5: Consent form for feminist activists

Project Title	Use of media platforms by activists to build an agenda on combating rape and sexual violence in India.
Purpose of the Study	<i>This research is being conducted by Pallavi Guha at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you have been involved in advocacy efforts on issues of sexual violence against women in India. The purpose of this research project is to examine the use of media by activists and the relationship with journalists and policymakers in building agenda on sexual violence against women in India.</i>
Procedures	<p><i>You have agreed to participate in an interview, which contains questions related to your experiences as an activist, focusing specifically on issues of sexual violence against women in India. Examples of questions include:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. What media strategies do you use in your activism efforts on issues of sexual violence against women?</i> <i>2. How do you communicate with policy makers?</i> <p><i>Your participation in is entirely voluntary. The interview will take between 30-45 minutes. It will be conducted via a medium that you choose (Face to Face/Skype/telephone). The interview will be audiotaped. If you do not wish to be recorded, you can still participate and the researcher will only take notes by hand.</i></p>
Potential Risks and Discomforts	<i>There are no known risks to the participants of the study. In order to avoid any breach of confidentiality, the contact information will then be deleted from the responses. The separate interview responses from the contact information, volunteered by those willing to be interviewed will not allow us to identify any respondent in terms of their responses</i>
Potential Benefits	<i>There are no direct benefits to participants but some indirect benefits include the opportunity to receive the results of the interview and will be able to develop greater understanding of an important and under studied issue.</i>

Confidentiality	<p><i>The interviews will be confidential. You will be given a choice of either remaining anonymous or being identified in the research. If you choose to be anonymous, any information obtained from interviews will be anonymized and no names will be used in the reporting of the research. The data from the research will be stored on a password-protected computer. The only individuals who will have access to this data is the researcher and the advisors. Once the interviews are completed which will take 12 months, this file will be deleted.</i></p>
Right to Withdraw and Questions	<p><i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. I will not share your responses or your participation in this study with your employer. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pallavi Guha 2100N Knight Hall University of Maryland College Park, MD, 20742 E-mail: pguha@umd.edu Telephone: 7328225433</p>
Participant Rights	<p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678</p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>
Statement of Consent	<p><i>By continuing with this interview, you indicate that you are above 18 years of age; you have read the consent form and you consent to participating in this interview. If you consent to this interview, please state, "I agree." Please state if you would like to be identified or not in this interview.</i></p>

Appendix 6: Hindi consent form for feminist activists

अनुसंधान मैरीलैंड विश्वविद्यालय, कॉलेज पार्क में पल्लवी गुहा द्वारा आयोजित किया जा रहा है। मैं इस शोध परियोजना में भाग लेने के लिए है क्योंकि आप भारत में महिलाओं के खिलाफ यौन हिंसा के मुद्दों पर रिपोर्टिंग में शामिल किया गया है। इस परियोजना का उद्देश्य भारत में महिलाओं के खिलाफ यौन हिंसा पर एक एजेंडा के निर्माण में कार्यकर्ताओं और पत्रकारों के साथ उनके रिश्ते और नीति निर्माताओं द्वारा मीडिया के उपयोग की जांच करने के लिए है। आप एक पत्रकार के रूप में अपने अनुभवों से संबंधित प्रश्न होते हैं, भारत में महिलाओं के खिलाफ यौन हिंसा के मुद्दों पर खबर पर विशेष रूप से ध्यान केंद्रित में भाग लेने के लिए सहमत हो गए हैं।

इस में आपकी भागीदारी पूरी तरह स्वैच्छिक है। साक्षात्कार 20-30 मिनट के बीच ले जाएगा। साक्षात्कार audiotaped होगा। आप नहीं चाहते हैं तो दर्ज किया है, तो आप अभी भी भाग ले सकते हैं और शोधकर्ता केवल हाथ से नोट ले जाएगा।

साक्षात्कार गोपनीय होगा। आप गुमनाम होना चुनते हैं, तो साक्षात्कार से प्राप्त किसी भी जानकारी गुमनाम हो जाएगा और कोई नाम नहीं अनुसंधान की रिपोर्टिंग में इस्तेमाल किया जाएगा।

आपकी भागीदारी पूरी तरह स्वैच्छिक है। आप सभी में भाग लेने के लिए नहीं चुन सकते हैं। मैं आपकी प्रतिक्रिया या अपने नियोक्ता के साथ इस अध्ययन में आपकी भागीदारी का हिस्सा नहीं होगा। आप इस शोध में भाग लेने का फैसला करते हैं, तो आप किसी भी समय भाग लेने बंद हो सकता है। इस अध्ययन में भाग लेने के लिए या यदि आप किसी भी समय भाग लेने बंद करो, तुम दंडित नहीं किया जाएगा या हार कोई लाभ नहीं करने का फैसला करता है, तो जो करने के लिए आप अन्यथा योग्य हैं।

मेरा पता:

पल्लवी गुहा
2100N नाइट हॉल
मैरीलैंड विश्वविद्यालय
कॉलेज पार्क, एमडी, 20742
ई-मेल: pguha@umd.edu
टेलीफोन: 7328225433

Appendix 7 Bengali consent form for feminist activists

এই গবেষণাটি মেরিল্যান্ড বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের পল্লবী গুহ দ্বারা পরিচালিত হচ্ছে, কলেজ পার্ক। আমি আপনাকে এই গবেষণা প্রকল্পে অংশগ্রহণের জন্য আমন্ত্রণ জানাচ্ছি কারণ আপনি ভারতে নারীর বিরুদ্ধে যৌন সহিংসতার বিষয়গুলির প্রতি সমর্থন উত্থাপন করছেন। এই গবেষণা প্রকল্পের উদ্দেশ্য ভারতবর্ষের নারীদের বিরুদ্ধে যৌন সহিংসতার বিষয়সূচি প্রণয়নকারী কর্মীদের দ্বারা প্রচার মাধ্যমের ব্যবহার এবং সাংবাদিক ও নীতিনির্ধারকদের সাথে যোগাযোগের পরীক্ষা করা। আপনি একটি সাক্ষাত্কারে অংশগ্রহণ করতে সম্মত হন, যার মধ্যে একজন সক্রিয় কর্মী হিসাবে আপনার অভিজ্ঞতার সাথে সম্পর্কিত প্রশ্ন রয়েছে, বিশেষ করে ভারতবর্ষে নারীর বিরুদ্ধে যৌন সহিংসতার বিষয়গুলির উপর মনোযোগ কেন্দ্রীভূত করা। প্রশ্নগুলির উদাহরণ অন্তর্ভুক্ত:

1. মহিলাদের বিরুদ্ধে যৌন সহিংসতার বিষয়ে আপনার সক্রিয়তা প্রচেষ্টায় আপনি কি মিডিয়া কৌশলগুলি ব্যবহার করেন?
2. আপনি কিভাবে নীতি প্রস্তুতকারকদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করবেন?

আপনার অংশগ্রহণ সম্পূর্ণরূপে স্বেচ্ছাসেবী। ইন্টারভিউ 30-45 মিনিটের মধ্যে নিতে হবে। এটি আপনার চয়ন করা একটি মাধ্যম (মুখ / স্কাইপ / টেলিফোনে মুখ) মাধ্যমে পরিচালিত হবে। সাক্ষাত্কারটি audiotaped হবে। যদি আপনি রেকর্ড করতে না চান, আপনি এখনও অংশগ্রহণ করতে পারেন এবং গবেষক শুধুমাত্র হাতে নোট নিতে হবে।

গবেষণার অংশীদারদের কোনও ঝুঁকি নেই। গোপনীয়তার কোনো লঙ্ঘন এড়ানোর জন্য, যোগাযোগের তথ্যগুলি প্রতিক্রিয়া থেকে মুছে ফেলা হবে। যোগাযোগের তথ্য থেকে আলাদা ইন্টারভিউ প্রতিক্রিয়া, সাক্ষাত্কার নিতে ইচ্ছুক ব্যক্তিদের দ্বারা স্বেচ্ছাসেবক তারা তাদের প্রতিক্রিয়ার পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে কোন প্রতিক্রিয়া সনাক্ত করতে অনুমতি দেবে না অংশগ্রহণকারীদের কোন সরাসরি বেনিফিট নেই কিন্তু কিছু পরোক্ষ বেনিফিটে সাক্ষাত্কারের ফলাফলগুলি পাওয়ার সুযোগ এবং একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ এবং অধীনস্ত বিষয় নিয়ে অধিকতর জ্ঞান অর্জন করতে সক্ষম হবে। সাক্ষাত্কার গোপনীয় হবে। আপনাকে বেনামী বা অবশিষ্ট সন্ধানের সন্ধান দেওয়া হবে। আপনি যদি বেনামী হতে চান, তাহলে ইন্টারভিউ থেকে প্রাপ্ত কোন তথ্য গোপনীয় হবে এবং গবেষণার রিপোর্টে কোনও নাম ব্যবহার করা হবে না। গবেষণা থেকে তথ্য একটি পাসওয়ার্ড সুরক্ষিত কম্পিউটারে সংরক্ষণ করা হবে। এই তথ্য অ্যাক্সেস আছে শুধুমাত্র ব্যক্তি যারা গবেষক এবং উপদেষ্টা হয়। একবার সাক্ষাত্কারগুলি সম্পন্ন হয়ে গেলে 1২ মাস লাগবে, এই ফাইলটি মুছে ফেলা হবে।

এই গবেষণায় আপনার অংশগ্রহণ সম্পূর্ণ স্বেচ্ছাসেবী। আপনি সব সময়ে অংশ নিতে না বেছে নিতে পারে। আপনি যদি এই গবেষণায় অংশগ্রহণ করার সিদ্ধান্ত নেন, তাহলে আপনি যেকোনো সময় অংশগ্রহণ বন্ধ করতে পারেন। আপনি যদি এই গবেষণায় অংশগ্রহণ না করার সিদ্ধান্ত নেন বা যে কোনও সময় অংশগ্রহণ করা বন্ধ করেন, তাহলে আপনাকে কোনও বেনিফিট বা শাস্তি হারাতে হবে না যা আপনি অন্যথায় যোগ্যতা অর্জন করেন। আপনার নিয়োগকর্তার সাথে আমি আপনার প্রতিক্রিয়া শেয়ার করব না বা এই অধ্যয়নে অংশগ্রহণ করবো না। যদি আপনি অধ্যয়নে অংশ নেওয়া বন্ধ করার সিদ্ধান্ত নেন, যদি আপনার কোন প্রশ্ন, উদ্বেগ বা অভিযোগ থাকে, অথবা যদি আপনি গবেষণা সংক্রান্ত আঘাত সম্পর্কিত রিপোর্ট করতে চান তবে অনুগ্রহ করে তদন্তকারীকে যোগাযোগ করুন: পল্লী গুহ

2100 এন নাইট হল
মেরিল্যান্ড বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের
কলেজ পার্ক, এমডি, ২০৭৪২
ই-মেইল: পগহা@উম.ডু
টেলিফোন: 7328২২২5433

যদি আপনার একটি গবেষণা অংশীদার হিসাবে আপনার অধিকার সম্পর্কে প্রশ্ন থাকে বা একটি গবেষণা সম্পর্কিত আঘাত রিপোর্ট করতে চান, তাহলে যোগাযোগ করুন:

মেরিল্যান্ড কলেজ পার্ক বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়
প্রতিষ্ঠানীয় পর্যালোচনা বোর্ড অফিস
1204 মেরি মাউন্ট হল
কলেজ পার্ক, মেরিল্যান্ড, ২০৭৪২
ই-মেইল: irb@umd.edu
টেলিফোন: 301-405-0678

এই গবেষণার পর্যালোচনা করা হয়েছে মেরিল্যান্ড বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, কলেজ পার্ক মানব বিষয় জড়িত গবেষণা জন্য আইআরবি পদ্ধতি।

এই সাক্ষাত্কারে অব্যাহতভাবে, আপনি ইচ্ছিত দেন যে আপনি 18 বছরেরও বেশি বয়সের; আপনি সম্মত ফর্মটি পড়েছেন এবং আপনি এই সাক্ষাত্কারে অংশগ্রহণের জন্য সম্মতি দিয়েছেন। আপনি যদি এই সাক্ষাত্কারে সম্মতি দেন তবে অনুগ্রহ করে বলুন, "আমি সম্মত।"
আপনি এই সাক্ষাত্কারে চিহ্নিত করা বা না করতে চান তাহলে অনুগ্রহ করে বলুন।

Appendix 8: Consent form for journalists

Project Title	Use of media platforms by activists to build an agenda on combating rape and sexual violence in India.
Purpose of the Study	<i>This research is being conducted by Pallavi Guha at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you have been involved in reporting on issues of sexual violence against women in India. The purpose of this research project is to examine the use of media by activists and their relationship with journalists and policymakers in building an agenda on sexual violence against women in India.</i>
Procedures	<p><i>You have agreed to participate in an interview, which contains questions related to your experiences as a journalist, focusing specifically on news on issues of sexual violence against women in India. Examples of questions include</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. What aspects do you focus on while covering incidents of sexual violence against women?</i> <i>2. How do you decide upon your sources in stories on sexual violence against women?</i> <p><i>Your participation in this is entirely voluntary. The interview will take between 30-45 minutes. It will be conducted via a medium that you choose (Face to Face/Skype/telephone). The interview will be audiotaped. If you do not wish to be recorded, you can still participate and the researcher will only take notes by hand.</i></p>
Potential Risks and Discomforts	<i>There are no known risks to the participants of the study. In order to avoid any breach of confidentiality, the contact information will then be deleted from the responses. The separate interview responses from the contact information, volunteered by those willing to be interviewed will not allow the researcher to identify any respondent in terms of their responses.</i>
Potential Benefits	<i>There are no direct benefits to participants but some indirect benefits include the opportunity to receive the results of the interview and will be able to develop greater understanding of an important and under studied issue.</i>

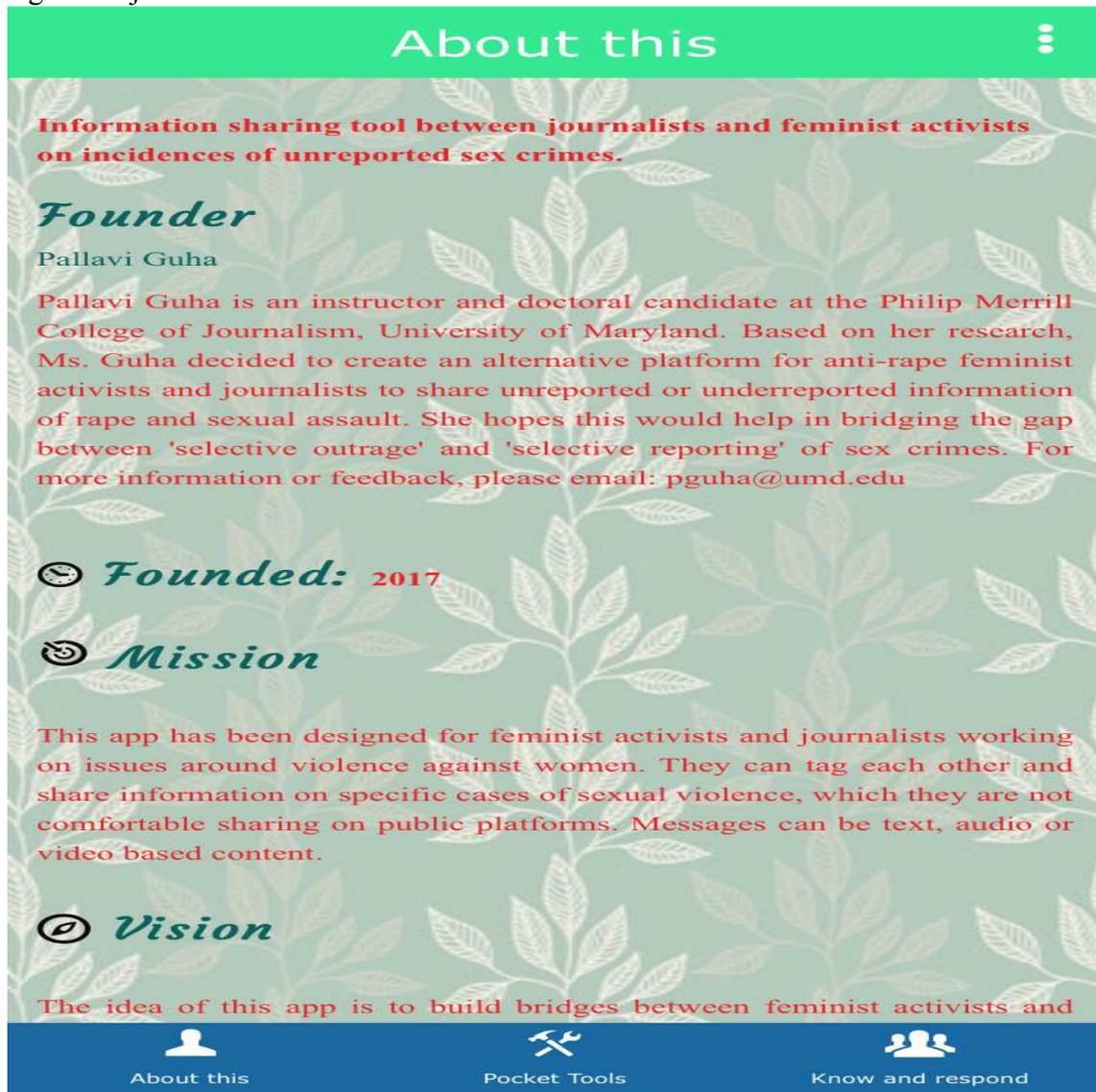
Confidentiality	<p><i>The interviews will be confidential. You will be given a choice of either remaining anonymous or being identified in the research. If you choose to be anonymous, any information obtained from interviews will be anonymized and no names will be used in the reporting of the research. The data from the research will be stored on a password-protected computer. The only individuals who will have access to this data are the researcher and the advisors. Once the interviews are completed which will take 12 months, this file will be deleted.</i></p>
Right to Withdraw and Questions	<p><i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. I will not share your responses or your participation in this study with your employer. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</i></p> <p><i>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:</i></p> <div data-bbox="553 900 1398 1125" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p><i>Pallavi Guha</i> <i>2100N Knight Hall</i> <i>University of Maryland</i> <i>College Park, MD, 20742</i> <i>E-mail: pguha@umd.edu</i> <i>Telephone: 7328225433</i></p> </div>
Participant Rights	<p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678</p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>
Statement of Consent	<p><i>By continuing with this interview, you indicate that you are above 18 years of age; you have read the consent form and you consent to participating in this interview. If you consent to this interview, please state, "I agree." Please state if you would like to be identified or not in this interview.</i></p>

Appendix 9: Interview Protocol Activists

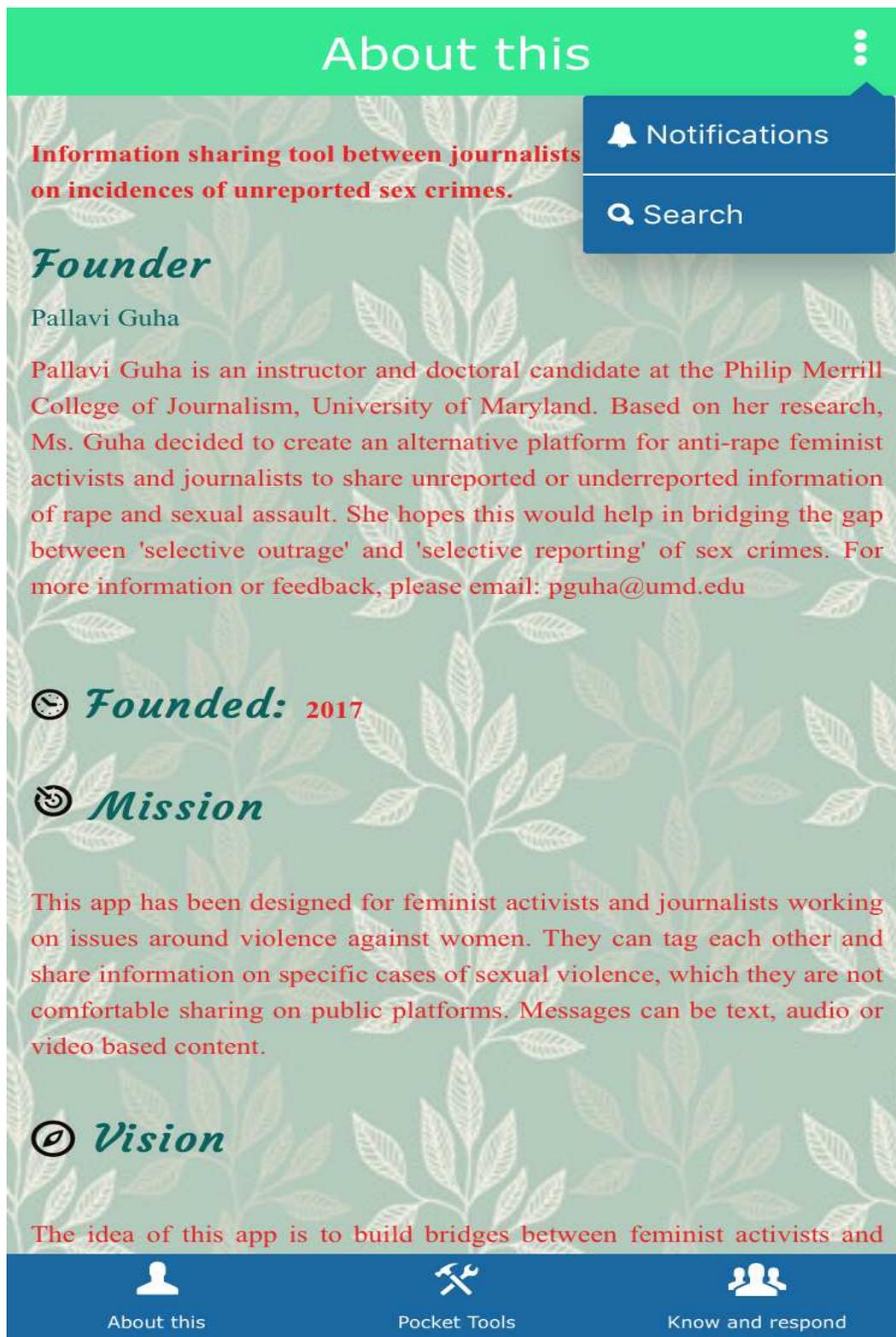
1. What media platforms do you use for feminist activism on rape & sexual assault?
2. Do you try to connect with policymakers on issues of rape and sexual assault? If so, how?
3. What strategies do you use to build public and political agenda on rape and sexual assault?
4. How do you network with journalists to push your messages on rape and sexual assault?
5. What is your experience of using social media platforms like Facebook and better for activism on rape and sexual assault?
6. Which media platform, including mass media and social media is more effective in feminist activism on issues of rape and sexual assault?
7. How do you communicate with policy makers?

Appendix 10: Interview Protocol Journalists

1. Who are your sources in incidents of rape and sexual assaults?
2. How do you decide on the amount of coverage that a particular rape and sexual assault case should receive?
3. Do you think social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have any influence on coverage of rape and sexual assault? Yes/No, why?
4. Do you use social media platforms for sources, quotes etc. to report on incidence of rape and sexual assault?
5. How do you decide on the amount of coverage that a particular rape and sexual assault case should receive?
6. How do you decide on the prominence (which page, column etc.) of coverage that a particular rape and sexual assault case should receive?
7. What aspects do you focus on while covering incidents of sexual violence against women?



Appendix 12: About this” page of Ekjut



Appendix 13: Password protected page on Ekjut to share information

 Know and respond

 Search

What's on your mind?

Private

 Status  Photos  Videos

Post

 **P** 
🔒 a month ago

Stuff happened



[0 Like\(s\)](#) [0 Comment\(s\)](#)

Appendix 14: Password protected page on Ekjut to share information and visuals



Know and respond

**P**
🕒 2 months ago 

Testing and tagging. Fight VAW.

2 Like(s) 0 Comment(s)



**Arya C**
🕒 a month ago 

Retest

1 Like(s) 0 Comment(s)



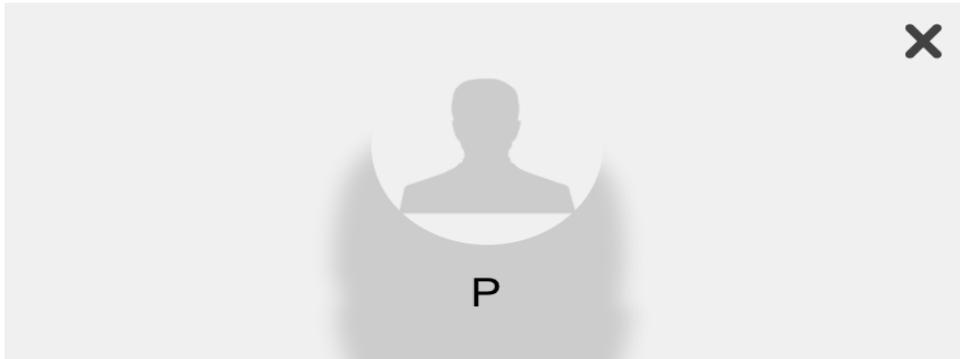
**P**
🕒 2 months ago 

Testing

0 Like(s) 0 Comment(s)



Appendix 15: Settings page on Ekjut to share information and visuals



Home

Main Menu

Tags

My Profile

Blocked Users

Logout

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