Caste-Hate Speech in the Age of Digital Society

#DalitLivesMatter

CONTENT

FOREWORD

On behalf of Social & Media Matters, it is with profound gratitude that we present this comprehensive report titled "Caste-Hate Speech in the Age of Digital Society." This publication is a testament to the collaborative effort and dedicated research that has been vital in illuminating the complexities of caste-based hate speech in our increasingly digital world.

We are immensely thankful to our social and media matters team members for their unwavering dedication and meticulous work. Their relentless efforts in collecting and analyzing over 1,000 posts from diverse social media platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and X, have been instrumental in revealing the intricate patterns and impact of caste discrimination that lurks within these digital realms.

Our heartfelt thanks extend to a remarkable group of individuals whose participation has been pivotal in enriching this study. Leaders who tirelessly combat caste-based discrimination, esteemed sociologists, and representatives from various NGOs have provided crucial insights that have greatly enhanced our understanding and analysis of the issues at hand. Their perspectives and expert knowledge have added invaluable depth to our research.

Furthermore, we are profoundly grateful for the continuous encouragement, guidance, and constructive criticism from our broader community of supporters. Their engagement has not only motivated us but has also been crucial in refining our approach and broadening the reach of this important work.

A special acknowledgment must be made to the **National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights** and the **Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent**, whose unyielding support and guidance were indispensable in bringing this project to fruition. We are also deeply appreciative of the exceptional contributions of **Beena Pallical, Paul Divakar, Pritika Pariyar, and Naveen Gautam**, whose dedicated efforts have significantly shaped the narrative and structure of this report.

From Team Social & Media Matters, we also extend our sincere thanks to **Prof. Anand Kumar** for his insights, the team of **Contrails.ai** for their technical partnership, and **Dr. Azizur Rahman Azami** of Aligarh Muslim University, whose intellectual leadership has provided a solid foundation and direction for our research.

This report not only reflects a collective commitment to addressing the issue of caste-based hate speech but also embodies our hope for a future where digital spaces are free from discrimination and hate. As we release this report, we invite readers to join us in advocating for change and implementing the strategies laid out in our findings to create safer, more inclusive online environments.

Thank you for your interest in and support for this vital issue.

INTRODUCTION

They mock Dalits with derogatory terms like "Aarakshanjeevi" and other casteist slurs. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube have a discriminatory verification process that creates a hierarchy in conversations, with verified accounts gaining more traction.

Many believe that instances of humiliating Dalits are no longer prevalent in society, but this is far from the truth. New methods continue to be created to humiliate Dalits, with a recent study showing that thirteen percent of hate posts on Facebook in India are related to caste-based hate speech. These posts include derogatory references to caste-based occupations and anti-Ambedkar content (Soundararajan, 2019) (Sajlan, 2021). There are private, exclusive dominant caste groups circulating hate speech, serving only their caste interests to reinforce casteism in digital and social spheres (Subham, 2022). Affiliating with these groups gives advantages in offline areas like housing and jobs. Anti-reservation and anti-SC-ST Act memes are shared widely among dominant caste groups, who consider themselves "deserved" and question the merit of Dalits.

They mock Dalits with derogatory terms like "Aarakshanjeevi" and other casteist slurs. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube have a discriminatory verification process that creates a hierarchy in conversations, with verified accounts gaining more traction (Kumar, 2024).

This subjective and arbitrary process leads to "denial" of verification for accounts of SCs, STs, and OBCs, as argued by Supreme Court lawyer Nitin Meshram[1]. Effectively moderating and identifying casteist content on social media is challenging, especially for India's caste-oppressed minorities. Current methods often fail to recognise and address subtle forms of discrimination related to caste. It is crucial to examine these shortcomings and propose solutions to improve the identification and responsible handling of casteist content on these platforms (ibid, 2024).

1 https://theprint.in/opinion/indias-oppressed-groups-had-high-hopes-from-internet-but-upper-castes-got-in-there-too/463431/

The world evolved from physical to virtual in 1989 when the World Wide Web (WWW) became readily accessible to the public in 1994. Since 2001, many significant platforms and devices have had a major impact on social life. Wikipedia and iTunes began in 2001, and LinkedIn was established in 2003. Facebook in 2004, Reddit, Flickr, and YouTube in 2005, Twitter in 2006, now known as X. smartphones in the market were introduced in 2007, and Instagram and tablet computers in 2010 (Deborah Lupton 2014).

In India's rapid economic development and modernisation, caste continues to significantly influence various aspects of contemporary society, including politics, economics, and culture. The intersection of caste with other axes of identity, such as gender, religion, and class, further complicates the dynamics of social inequality and exclusion (Jaffrelot, 2003). Caste atrocities continue to plague Indian society, with numerous incidents reported each year. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data,[2] there were over 57582 cases of crimes against Scheduled Castes. And a total of 10,064 cases were registered for committing crime against Scheduled Tribes (ST), which is an increase of 14.3% over 2021 (8,802 cases).

These crimes range from verbal abuse and discrimination to physical violence and even murder. Despite laws in place to protect marginalised communities,[3] such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, and Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 implementation remains weak, and perpetrators often go unpunished. Since introducing new technology, these evils have transformed on social media platforms.

In Ogburn Nimkoff's words, it is culture lage since norms and values could not qualitatively progress as technology and material development grow. As of February 2024, India boasts over 850 million internet users, with mobile internet consumption averaging 19.5 GB per month. (Internet and Mobile Association of India, 2024).

From its humble beginnings in the 1980s to becoming one of the largest internet markets in the world, India's internet story underscores the transformative power of connectivity in driving socio-economic progress and fostering digital inclusion.

Social media penetration in India is 33.4%, indicating that 40.2% of the country's population, equivalent to 398 million people,[4] are active on social media platforms as of 2023. The average Indian social media user spends 17 hours weekly on these platforms, surpassing users in China and the United States. Major platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and YouTube dominate the Indian market. However, these platforms have also been used to propagate hate speech, particularly related to caste discrimination. Despite its 15-year presence in India, Facebook only addressed caste-based hate speech in its community standards in 2018. Instagram's hate speech policy, implemented on April 19, 2018, covers characteristics like race and gender but not caste.

With approximately 22 million users worldwide, Twitter introduced its hate speech policy on December 18, 2017, initially excluding caste as a protected category. Caste was eventually included in the policy update on January 12, 2020, and officially recognized on December 25, 2020. India leads in YouTube usage, boasting 225 million active users per hour as of July 2021.

YouTube's hate speech policy, which appeared on the Wayback Machine on November 14, 2019, prohibits content promoting violence or hatred based on various attributes, including caste. This policy remains in effect as of August 26, 2021.

2   A Look back at hate crimes against Dalits and Adivasis Dalits and Adivasis continue to fall victim to social stigma and violence 2022. retrived from https://cjp.org.in/2022-a-look-back-at-hate-crimes-against-dalits-and-adivasis/
3   lbd
4   Belle Wong Febuary 6 2024 Top Social Media Statistics And Trends Retrived from https://www.forbes.com/advisor/in/business/social-media-statistics/#:~:text=Active%20Social%20Media%20Penetration%20in%20India%20is,40.2%20percent%20of%20the%20country's%20entire%20population

METHODOLOGY

We comprehensively analyzed caste-based hate speech on social media platforms through digital ethnography. Specifically, we focused on collecting data from Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, widely used platforms in India.

Our methodology gathered over 1000 social media posts from X Facebook/Instagram and YouTube. This sampling strategy aimed to provide a diverse and representative dataset of content related to caste discrimination and hate speech.

To collect the data, we employed various techniques, including keyword searches, targeted browsing of relevant groups and pages, and analysis of trending topics and hashtags. Additionally, we utilized advanced search functionalities and data scraping tools to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant content.

Once collected, the social media posts were systematically analyzed to identify instances of caste-based hate speech, including explicit slurs, derogatory remarks, and discriminatory comments targeting individuals or groups based on their caste identity.

Furthermore, we employed qualitative coding techniques to categorize and analyze the collected data, identifying patterns, themes, and trends in the prevalence and nature of caste-based hate speech on social media platforms.

Our methodology aimed to provide a robust understanding of caste-based discrimination and hate speech in the digital realm, enabling us to draw meaningful insights and recommendations for addressing this pressing issue.

UNDERSTANDING HATE SPEECH

The concept of hate speech encompasses expressions that incite hatred, violence, and discrimination against individuals or specific groups based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. Although no universally accepted legal definition of hate speech exists, its significance as a human rights issue has been recognized and addressed at the highest international levels, including by the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU). Also there is a plan of action against hate speech at the UN Level.

At its core, hate speech undermines the fundamental principles of equality, dignity, and respect for all individuals, fostering division and hostility within societies. It perpetuates harmful stereotypes, deepens societal tensions, and poses significant social cohesion and peace threats.

Recognizing the detrimental impact of hate speech, various international human rights instruments, and conventions have emphasized the importance of combating such expressions to uphold human rights and promote inclusive and pluralistic societies.

Efforts to address hate speech encompass a range of approaches, including legal frameworks, education and awareness-raising initiatives, media literacy programs, and community engagement strategies. While striking a delicate balance between protecting freedom of expression and preventing the spread of hate, countries, and international organizations continue to work towards developing effective measures to combat hate speech and promote tolerance, understanding, and respect for diversity. By acknowledging hate speech as a human rights issue and collectively confronting its manifestations, we can strive towards building a world where all individuals can live free from fear, discrimination, and prejudice.

Legal Recognition of Caste Hate in India

In India, constitutional and legal protections against caste atrocities are enshrined in various provisions to address the historical discrimination and violence faced by marginalised caste/marginalised communities. The Indian Constitution prohibits discrimination based on caste[5] and ensures equality before the law under Articles 14, 15, 16, 17 and 46. The Articles guarantee equality before the law and equal protection of the laws (Article 14), prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15), and equality of opportunity in matters of public employment (Article 16). Article 17 explicitly abolishes "untouchability" and its practice in any form. Article 46 talks about special care regarding educational and economic development of the Scheduled caste.

Additionally, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 (SC/ST Act), provides specific legal protection to individuals belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) from atrocities and violence perpetrated against them due to their caste identity. In addition, although we have another law, namely the Protection of Civil Rights Act, of 1955, its implementation on the ground has been a major challenge. The act lists various offences, including atrocities such as assault, humiliation, and intimidation, and prescribes stringent penalties for offenders.

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act, 2015,[6] expanded the scope of offences under the SC/ST Act, enhanced the quantum of punishment for perpetrators, and introduced new provisions to improve the investigation and prosecution of cases related to caste-based atrocities.

Established under Article 338 of the Constitution, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) is mandated to investigate and monitor matters related to the safeguards provided for SCs under the Constitution and other laws. It plays a crucial role in addressing grievances and advocating for the rights of SCs.

Moreover, the SC/ST/POA Act mandates the establishment of special courts and appointing special public prosecutors[7] to ensure the expeditious trial of cases related to caste atrocities, thereby providing speedy justice to victims.

Despite these constitutional and legal provisions, caste hate abuse online has become an issue for India. Social media platforms are not adhering to international standards.

Efforts to combat online hate speech face challenges due to its vernacular nature. However, initiatives such as conducting surveys to understand the nature of caste hate and developing keywords for AI moderation show promise in addressing this issue.

While the Indian constitution guarantees various measures to combat caste hate speech, there are limitations to combating online hate speech due to the vast user base of social media platforms. Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube need to implement measures for social justice. While these platforms adhere to hate speech policies in Western countries, they need to do more in India, which is a significant market for social media. This failure to control hate speech online can lead to real-world consequences.

5   About casts and inequalities in India - The big picture : Indian Samurai इंडियन सामुराई. Retrieved from http://www.indiandacoit.com/archive/2013/04/22/about-casts-and-inequalities-in-india-the-big-picture.html

6   https://ncsc.nic.in/files/POA_ACT_2016.01.pdf

7   Retrived from https://socialjustice.gov.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/arpoa06.pdf

Election Commission of India - Approach For Hate Speech

1. Relies on the IPC[8] and RP[9] Act due to the lack of specific laws against hate speech and rumor-mongering.
2. Aim to prevent party members from causing societal disharmony.

The ECI has yet to provide any recommendations regarding the Supreme Court's query on whether the Law Commission of India should be granted the power to deny political party membership for hate speech (Rajagopal, 2022). Furthermore, political parties and candidates are prohibited from participating in actions that incite hate among groups by the Model Code of Conduct established by the Election Commission of India (Parthasarathy, 2022).

The Model Code, despite not being based on parliamentary legislation, is morally authoritative and has a significant impact on political leaders. Violations often result in advice, warning, or censure, but no punitive action can be taken.

Despite this, both candidates and parties rarely argue that the Model Code is illegitimate or should be abandoned, as it creates a negative public perception before elections (Ahuja and Ostermann, 2021).

The EC ensures political parties adhere to the Model Code of Conduct, prohibiting religion, hate speech, caste, communal feelings, corruption, and using government machinery for election purposes, regardless of power at the Centre or state.

According to the V-Dem (Varieties of Democracies), report India's transition to electoral autocracy in 2018 and its deterioration in the clean elections index, ranking it among 18 countries with a significant decline in free and fair elections (Dasgupta, 2024). However, there are sufficient legal frameworks to effectively control hate speech. The implementation and interpretation phases are where the issue is.

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8 Indian Penal Code is a complete code intended to cover all aspects of criminal law which came in force in 1862 in all British Presidencies. for more info please see https://lddashboard.legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A1860-45.pdf

9 Representation of People Act 1951 is an Act of parliament of India to provide for the conduct of election of the House of Parliament and Houses of Legislature of each state, qualification and disqualification for membership of those houses, the corrupt practices and other offences at or in connection with such elections and the decision of doubts and disputes arising out of or in connection with such election. for more info please see https://www.parlament.cat/document/intrade/181101
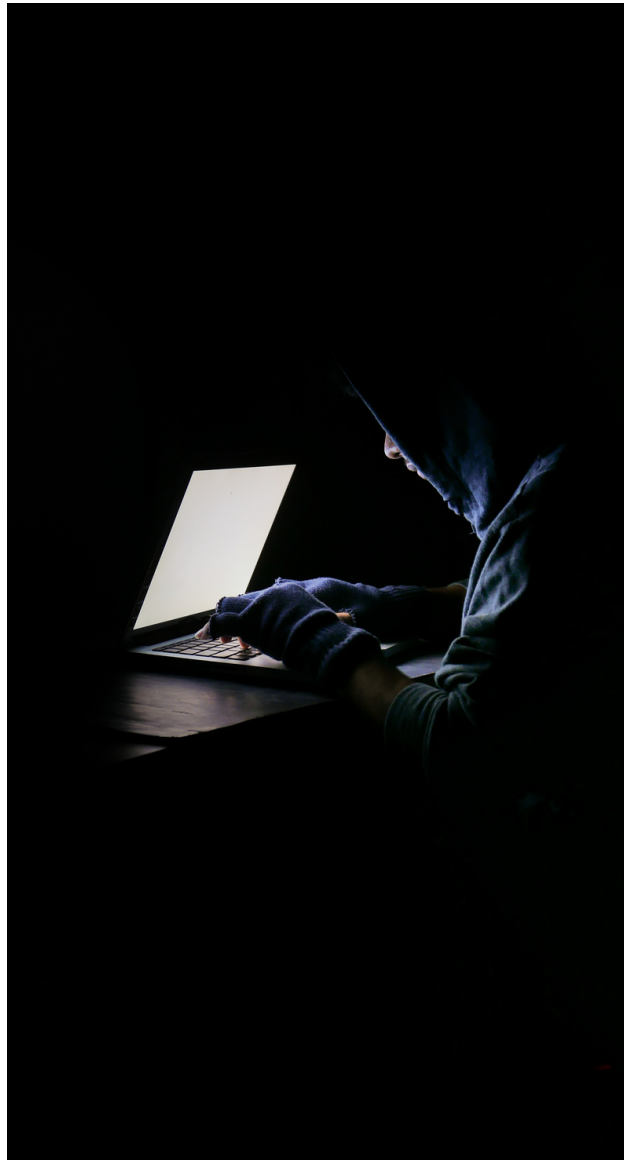
CASTE HATE SPEECH ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The analysis of 1000 posts on social media platforms reveals the multifaceted nature of caste hate in India. Casteism manifests itself in various forms, including the promotion of one's caste, the use of abusive language by dominant caste individuals towards members of Scheduled Castes, and inter-caste abuses and supremacy within the OBC caste members disparaging individuals from the same caste. Additionally, it's noted that members of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) also engage in derogatory remarks towards Scheduled Castes.

Discrimination

While there are instances of Scheduled Caste groups retaliating with abusive language towards uppe caste individuals, the analysis indicates that Scheduled Castes bear the brunt of social media hate speech and discrimination. This finding underscores the entrenched inequalities and power dynamics within Indian society, where historically marginalised groups face disproportionate levels of discrimination and abuse, even in digital spaces.

Discrimination disguised as humor or opinion. It often targets individuals or communities based on their caste identity, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing social hierarchies.

The manifestation of online caste can be seen in three categories: self-pride, casteism, and Caste hate. In caste self-pride, We can say it is ethnocentrism, which does not directly target any caste group, but its nature is ethnocentric, that our caste is superior. In social media platforms, many such groups can be seen, like Kshatriya Mahasabha, Kshatriya Sena, karni sena, Rajpoot Sena, Brahman Mahasabha, kayasth Mahasabha, vaishya samaj, Jat group, Yadav group such type caste group shows that caste is persisted in an identical form which leads to some time abusive language to other caste group.

Many caste hate speeches emerge on social media generally to respond to physical world incidents, caste atrocity news on media, and political mobilisation of small caste-based political parties who seek support based on the caste lines. In that case, comments on that post are violent and caste-hate in nature.

Types and Forms of Caste Hate Speech Online

The presence of Dr Bheem Rao Ambedkar's photo in memes and satire reflects a disturbing trend where humour and irony are used to propagate caste-based stereotypes. In such instances, the experiences of oppressed castes, as symbolised by Dr Ambedkar, are trivialised, leading to the perpetuation of discrimination.

Dr Ambedkar's photo in such memes and satire highlights the need for greater awareness and sensitivity towards caste-based issues. It underscores the importance of challenging and confronting discriminatory attitudes and online and offline behaviours to create a more inclusive and equitable society.

This act also attract Section 3(t)(v) of SC/ST (PoA)Act, 1989

1. Direct Verbal Abuse: This includes explicit slurs. The analysis of the text reveals a concerning prevalence of direct verbal abuse, including explicit slurs, insults, and threats directed towards individuals or groups based on their caste. The study examined 1000 posts on X Instagram and YouTube videos along with their comments, finding that most of the slurs were found on X, followed by YouTube and Instagram comments, with Facebook having fewer instances of slurs than these platforms.

The provided examples illustrate the disturbing nature of caste-based verbal abuse present on social media platforms. The derogatory language used in the tweets perpetuates harmful stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards marginalised communities.

2. Memes and Satire: Some perpetrators use humour and satire to propagate caste-based stereotypes, often trivialising the experiences of oppressed castes and perpetuating discrimination.

Memes and satire reinforce existing societal power structures and hierarchies in this context. By making light of the struggles and experiences of marginalised communities, perpetrators normalise and perpetuate harmful stereotypes, contributing to the marginalisation and oppression of these groups.

Example 1

Comments ⓘ

▓▓▓▓▓▓ 19w ♡ 73
वर्ण व्यवस्था अमर रहे, जब तक धरती है सूर्य है चंद्रमा है मनुवाद रहेगा. हम भारत भव्य बनाएंगे हम हिंदू राष्ट्र बनाएंगे 🚩🚩 🚩🚩
Reply   See translation

▓▓▓▓ 9w ♡ 97
▓▓▓▓ ▓▓▓▓ ▓▓▓▓ ▓▓▓▓ bap ka loda banaoge
Reply   See translation

Example 2
नीच तो तुम हो भाई .... आरक्षण की भीख के दम पर खाने वाले भी नीचता का सर्टिफिकेट बंट रहे अपने बेटे का जाति प्रमाण पत्र बनवाना मत भूल जाना , वर्ना बिचारा कुछ कर नहीं पायेगा और ब्राह्मण को दोष दोगे कि कुछ करने नहीं दिया, कुछ पानी पीने नहीं दिया और ना जाने क्या क्या

Example 3
मुफ्त की मलाई खाने वाले मानसिक विकलांग का प्रमाण पत्र बिना सरकारी भीख के चपरासी की औकात नहीं है और मुंह से बकवास करवा लो इनसे

Example 4
आरक्षण छाप भीमते ट्वीट डिलीट क्यों किया ? सुन गधे , अब वो समय गया जब तुम हिंदू धर्म के खिलाफ प्रोपेगेंडा करो और हम चुप कर के सुनते रहे। जैसे को तैसा मिलेगा

Furthermore, the use of humour and satire in this manner can desensitise individuals to the seriousness of caste-based discrimination and violence. It creates a culture where caste-based stereotypes are accepted and normalised, undermining efforts towards social justice and equality.

3. Misinformation and Stereotyping: False narratives and stereotypes about certain caste groups are spread online, leading to the reinforcement of biases and prejudices.

4. Cyberbullying and Harassment: Individuals from marginalised castes may face online harassment and bullying, including doxxing, stalking, and intimidation tactics.

GENDER AND CASTE-BASED ONLINE VIOLENCE

We all are aware that women from the scheduled castes are further marginalized and face violence both as a result of their gender and caste location. One could observe in the offline spaces how sexual abuse and violence is used as a tool to silence the women from Scheduled Caste communities.

A reflection of the offline space can be very much seen in the online space where women from the scheduled caste communities are abused by their caste names and gender, and often rape threats and other abuse based on their caste locations are used against them. Caste abuses are used to break their dignity and slut shaming based on their caste location. A very prominent Dalit journalist continues to face harassment and online abuse as a result of her caste, which intersects with Gender.

COMBATTING CASTE HATE

Finally, we have compiled a lengthy list of Hindi and regional languages used to harass caste groups and individuals, even without understanding these languages. Artificial language algorithms could not detect all instances, but here are a few examples: "Bheemta," "Aarakshan jeevi," "Mand buddhi," and "arakshan ki bheek," among hundreds of other derogatory terms and abusive targeting lower castes.

It is crucial to note that this is not an issue of freedom of expression; rather, it constitutes hate speech and slur, as it undermines the notion of equality among human beings. India has grappled with tackling caste prejudice and hate, with efforts to promote equality at the core of the Indian Constitution. However, social media platforms prioritise profit over addressing such issues. They must establish internal moderation teams to handle such content, as outsourcing this responsibility undermines the efforts of the Indian Constitution and policymakers.

Combating hate speech is extremely difficult, which has yet to be addressed within the confines of our current legal system. It could be physically and emotionally draining for any individual to combat hate speech, especially when it comes to caste hatred. Therefore, Countering as a group makes any person feel bolder and more capable of carrying out their counter-speech efforts.

- Some of the Online Hate Speech Interventions are:—utilisation of television, radio, youth conferences, and text messaging campaigns against caste hate speech.
- A strong legal framework to deal with hate speech, particularly caste hate speech
- Caste-based hate speech should be given the same level of protection as racial hate speech and be put on an equal footing with it.
- There should be explicit provisions for the Indian authorities to monitor caste abuse and hate speech. They should instruct social media platforms that such activities are not permitted. Considering that almost 33 percent of the Indian population utilizes these platforms, organizers of large gatherings must accept responsibility for managing them effectively.

There is an excellent chance that caste will be overlooked if it is not expressly addressed in the human rights discourse and is instead "hidden" behind other news stories. Increasing transparency and cultural awareness are critical to creating safer and more inclusive online spaces and bridging geographical and cultural barriers. We must recognise caste-hate speech as a type of hate speech and include the affected communities in efforts to stop it online and offline. Not only must caste be acknowledged as a protected group, but institutional impediments that sustain caste-based discrimination in the Internet sphere must be properly dismantled. India requires a multi-stakeholder strategy that involves coordinated efforts from social media companies, governments, and civil society to combat online content successfully.

Therefore, social media platforms must respect India's decades-long journey towards a more just society through legal, administrative, and societal efforts. Social media platforms must also acknowledge and adhere to Indian laws and customs, similar to their compliance with regulations in Western and European countries. Currently, social media platforms perpetuate hate speech against religions, further damaging Indian society. While platforms operate differently in Western countries, they neglect their responsibilities in India.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, consistent with the terms of service, community guidelines, and the provisions of the Indian Penal Code, the propagation of hate speech constitutes a criminal offence. To ensure compliance and uphold community standards, it is imperative that enhanced content moderation practices be adopted, including the deployment of contextual AI technologies to detect and remove such content promptly. Additionally, legal measures should be pursued against individuals responsible for disseminating hate speech. Given the ongoing election campaigns, it is also advisable for the Election Commission of India to mandate social media and video-sharing platforms to rigorously monitor and curb the spread of harmful content by its creators and distributors, thereby safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process.

While major technology platforms universally assert policies that prohibit hate speech and discrimination, including those based on caste, there is a significant gap in the implementation of these policies. Despite these formal declarations, the actual moderation and enforcement practices often fall short, allowing caste-based hate speech to proliferate relatively unchecked across social networks. This discrepancy largely stems from the platforms' limited understanding of the cultural and social nuances specific to caste discrimination, as well as the lack of region-specific moderation strategies that can effectively identify and mitigate such content. Furthermore, the reliance on automated systems and algorithms, which lack the contextual awareness necessary to distinguish between harmful content and benign communication, exacerbates the issue. Effective implementation of these policies requires a concerted effort from tech companies to invest in culturally informed AI technologies and to expand their teams of local experts who can provide the necessary insight and oversight needed to address this pervasive issue.

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