



# Cyberstalking, Cyberbullying and Online Trolling: An Insightful Study

DR. SUSHILKUMAR M. PARMAR

Assistant Professor

Department of Commerce and Business Management - Faculty of Commerce

The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda

Vadodara – Gujarat (India)

## Abstract:

**Purpose:** This research study was primarily undertaken to offer an insightful information on online toxicity and also understand the multitude and magnitude of online trolling, cyberstalking and harassment incidents.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study included exclusively the relevant secondary data concerning to incidents of online trolling, cyberstalking and harassment. The data reported in the study, were gathered from the authentic sources such as published & unpublished statistics, reports of the research agencies, and previous similar research studies. The results have been discussed and presented using percentage, frequency distribution, charts, and diagrams.

**Rationality & Significance:** In the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and social media, there have been frequent reporting of incidents of cyberbullying, trolling, stalking and harassment which consequently affect the mental health of the victims. The insights help the users note only to deal with online toxicity but also to devise a plan to sensitize them.

**Findings:** The findings of the study revealed that there were 19.9 per cent of tweets that are relating to sexism or misogyny, while 14.6 per cent of tweets were concerning to ethnic or religious slurs. Moreover, out of 10, eight Indians experienced online harassment. Similarly, 42 per cent of youth were bullied on Instagram while 37 per cent of youth on Facebook. Adding to that, 35 per cent of youth belonging to LGBT+ community get online threats while 58 per cent of them are bullied by the hate speech.

**Originality and Value:** Actually, the research conducted is original in nature and the study laid more emphasis on offering the useful insights on online trolling, cyberbullying, cyberstalking and harassment.

---

**Keywords:** Online, Toxicity, Trolling, Cyberbullying, Cyberstalking, Harassment

---

## 1. Introduction and Background of the Study

In the digital landscape, trolling on digital platforms is common and is often experienced by the internet users. According to Biyun wo, online trolling is an aggressive online behaviour resulting to serious consequences for mental health of internet users. The article published on the website of The New Indian Express, there are 18 percent of internet users who go through online harassment.

## 2. Online/Internet Trolling

In a real sense, an online trolling is regarded as an extension of offline abuse (Pandey, 2020). It is, in fact, an offensive online behaviour of a sadist seeking a pleasure in spreading the hate and posting negative comments online. The word 'troll' means a mythological monster hiding under the bridges to lure and catch innocent passers-by in his snare (Fichman & Sanfilippo, 2016). The term internet trolling is nothing but a malicious online behaviour that is a hostile and intentional in nature to provoking and hurting the target. People who are indulged in trolling try to instigate, upset and harm the targets with inflammatory, derogatory comments and posts. In fact, trolls do this business just for the sake of fun and get sadistic pleasure by hurting the victims. According to (Molenda, Rogoza, & Michalski, 2022), it is

an undesirable activity happening on virtual platform. This type of online behaviour consequently affects physically and psychologically causing to lower self-esteem, distress, self-harm, suicidal thoughts among the victims. The malevolent troll tends to constantly stalk and harass the victim to the extreme level leading him/her to the mental trauma. 'Troll Police' is the famous M-TV show which is based on online Trolling.

### 3. Cyberbullying

As per the latest report, female, child, LGBTQ+ community members, famous personalities including politicians and actors are generally the victims of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying refers to targeting, threatening and humiliating an internet user because of his/her profession, colour, caste, creed, religion, gender, sexual preferences or ideology. Cyberbullying is not done merely by negative comments. In most of the cases, memes and reels are created and posted to bully the target. Disappointingly, some time, such contents are shared as frequently as possible which badly influence the mental health of the target.

### 4. Cyberstalking

Cyberstalk is regarded as a type of online toxic behaviour of a perpetrator who stalk the target on his/her digital profile. The malice intentions of a cyberstalker could be hurting a target, keeping an eye on online activities of a target, establishing an unsolicited digital connection, hacking digital account etc. Mainly, females and celebrities often become the victims of cyberstalking. Most of the times, it is seen that the cyberstalker hides the identify to fulfil his/her illicit purpose.

### 5. Review of Literature

(Cook, Schaafsma, & Antheunis, 2018) asserted that personal enjoyment, thrills and revenge drive trolling online. There can be behavioural and verbal trolling. According to (Papapicco & Quatera, 2019), mostly innocent people get caught in the snare of trolls and tend to respond such provocative acts causing them emotional and mental harm. (Deshmukh & Sonune, 2020) are of a view that a troll is a provocative statement or comment made by a person intended to evoke the emotional reactions of the victim. It was suggested that on being victimized, women should fearlessly come forward and report such incidents to prevent in future. (Pandey, 2020) found that particularly in India, there are innumerable number of provisions in the legal framework through which such issues can be dealt with. However, there is no such a special law or provision that can directly treat the online toxicity. Social life, physical and mental health of a victim are badly affected by trolling. Fazida Karim (2020) conducted a systematic review of literatures concerning to usage and connection of social media and mental health. The findings revealed that social media influences mental health in terms of anxiety and depression. Ginés Navarro-Carrillo, Jorge Torres-Marín, Hugo Carretero-Dios, (2021), increase use of aggressive and self-defeating humor styles have correlation with online trolling. (Salian & Ghosh, 2022) opined that the ugly side of social media is online trolling and hateful comments. Most often, female content creators become the victims of such toxic verbal violence on the digital platforms. The authors tried to understand female YouTubers' trolling and backlash experience along with their implications. (Molenda, Rogoza, & Michalski, 2022) stated that online space is a hostile place for virtually vulnerable people and made an attempt to investigate harmful online activity affecting the internet users. The findings revealed that the basic temperamental dispositions motivate trolls to offend and irritate others on online space which consequently offer a sadistic pleasure to the formers. This type of offensive and provocative behaviour is attributed to some kinds of personality traits and temperamental issues. (Al-Adhaileh, Aldhyani, & Alghamdi, 2023) believed that trolling on social media is an antisocial behaviour. In recent years, hoax is spread by the troll online. Such trolls and dubious people create fake social media accounts and fulfil their desires of hurting and humiliating the victims. In most of the cases, a request is received by the victim from the anonymous account. (Khalaf, Alubied, Khalaf, & Rifaey, 2023) conducted a system review using PRISMA. The authors concluded that the usage of social media among adolescents has resulted into self-harming behaviour, mental distress, and suicidality. The most of adolescents tend to get indulged into trolling for the fun without being aware of possible mental distress.

## 6. Statement of Research Problem

As per the latest Australian research, it is estimated that out of three internet users, one becomes the victim of an online harassment. As the incidents of online trolling, cyberstalking and harassment are on rise, the research has made an attempt to carry out the study in the same area.

## 7. Research Objective

To study an online toxicity and also understand the multitude and magnitude of online trolling, cyberstalking and harassment incidents.

## 8. Method and Material

The present study is descriptive in nature and all relevant secondary information reported herein were collected from the published statistics, reports, and blogs viz. Troll Patrol India, 2019, Troll Patrol India, 2020, Cyberbullying Statistics, Facts and Trends, 2023, Online Hate and Harassment: The American Experience 2023, YouGov Survey – ADL, India; FICCI; EY; NCRB (India), 2016 to 2022, Statista 2023. The results have been discussed with the help of frequency distribution, percentage, and appropriate charts.

## 9. Significance of Research

The results of the study give a comprehensive understanding on online toxicity and highlight the dark side of the digital culture. Moreover, a legal remedy to overcome the incidents of grave evils of online culture can be thought of taking the reference of this research study. In the same way, internet users can also be sensitized about the online toxicity and way to combat the same.

## 10. Results and Discussion

The published statistics of Neilson states that 40 percent of female residing in India are scared of online trolls. For women, online trolling is the extension of routine domestic harassment. Amnesty International had conducted a survey in year 2017 wherein it is reported that 70 percent of female internet users were compelled to change the way of using the internet due to online violence. Similarly, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of them restrict themselves to post any comment on the digital platforms. In this line, Cyber Crime Cell and the Ministry of Women and Child Development have been putting in so much efforts to prevent such type of harassment. Besides, according to the Cyberbullying Statistics, Facts and Trends – 2023, India, Brazil and the USA are the top three countries where the incidents of maximum online harassment and trolling are being reported. There are nearly 64 percent of British netizens belonging to the age group of 16-24 years are engaged in harassing and hurting the others on the digital platform as reported in the results of a survey conducted by Avast Foundation. The survey of Norton conducted by Symantec revealed that out of 10, eight Indians experience online harassment.

Country	Problematic content targeting women politicians
India	10.5
USA	6.4
UK	5.9
Troll Patrol India – Exposing Online Abuse Faced by Women Politicians in India (for period of March – May 2019) <a href="https://decoders.blob.core.windows.net/troll-patrol-india-findings/Amnesty_International_India_Troll_Patrol_India_Findings_2020.pdf">https://decoders.blob.core.windows.net/troll-patrol-india-findings/Amnesty_International_India_Troll_Patrol_India_Findings_2020.pdf</a> accessed 19/12/2023	

As reported by Troll Patrol India, there are 10.5 per cent of problematic content targeting women politicians in India while in USA and UK, the per cent of problematic content targeting women politicians are 6.4 per cent and 5.9 per cent respectively.

**Table 1. Country wise Abusive content targeting women politicians**

Country	Abusive content targeting women politicians (%)
India	3.3
USA	1.5
UK	1.3
Troll Patrol India – Exposing Online Abuse Faced by Women Politicians in India (for period of March – May 2019) <a href="https://decoders.blob.core.windows.net/troll-patrol-india-findings/Amnesty_International_India_Troll_Patrol_India_Findings_2020.pdf">https://decoders.blob.core.windows.net/troll-patrol-india-findings/Amnesty_International_India_Troll_Patrol_India_Findings_2020.pdf</a> accessed 19/12/2023	

As shown in the above table, the per cent of online contents that involve abusing women politicians in India, USA, and UK are 3.3 per cent, 1.5 per cent and 1.3 per cent respectively.

**Table 2. Type of Problematic and Abusive Tweets/Content by the Politicians in India**

Type of Problematic and Abusive Tweets	Percent of Problematic and Abusive Content by the politicians in India
Sexism or Misogyny	19.9
Ethnic or religious slurs	14.6
Racism	9.5
Physical threats	8.7
Caste slurs	5.9
Homophobia or transphobia	5.2
Sexual threats	2.9
Troll Patrol India – Exposing Online Abuse Faced by Women Politicians in India, 2020 <a href="https://decoders.blob.core.windows.net/troll-patrol-india-findings/Amnesty_International_India_Troll_Patrol_India_Findings_2020.pdf">https://decoders.blob.core.windows.net/troll-patrol-india-findings/Amnesty_International_India_Troll_Patrol_India_Findings_2020.pdf</a> accessed 19/12/2023	

The above statistics reveal that 19.9 per cent of tweets of politicians in India are related to sexism or misogyny, 14.6 per cent of tweets are concerning to ethnic or religious slurs while 9.5 per cent of tweets are pertaining to racism. Whereas, 8.7 per cent of tweets are related to physical threats and 5.9 per cent of them are pertaining to caste slurs. Furthermore, there are 5.2 per cent of tweets are concerning to homophobia or transphobia.

**Table 3. Cyberbullying on Social Media**

Social Media Platform	Percent of Youth
Instagram	42
Facebook	37
Snapchat	31
WhatsApp	12
YouTube	10
Twitter	9
Cyberbullying Statistics, Facts and Trends, 2023 <a href="https://firstsiteguide.com/cyberbullying-stats/#:~:text=Internet%20trolls%20are%20most%20active,%2C%20chat%20rooms%2C%20and%20blogs.https://enough.org/stats_cyberbullying">https://firstsiteguide.com/cyberbullying-stats/#:~:text=Internet%20trolls%20are%20most%20active,%2C%20chat%20rooms%2C%20and%20blogs.https://enough.org/stats_cyberbullying</a>	

The above table depicts that 42 per cent of youth are bullied on Instagram while 37 per cent of youth are bullied on Facebook. While on Snapchat, 31 per cent of youth are bullied. Total per cent of youth bullied on WhatsApp are 12 per cent. Similarly, total per cent of youth bullied on YouTube and Twitter are 10 per cent and 9 per cent respectively.

**Table 4. Types of Online Harassment**

Types of Online Harassment	Percent of youth
Sexual Remarks	12.1
Online Rumours	20.1
Mean Comments	22.5
Others	45.3
Cyberbullying Statistics, Facts and Trends, 2023 <a href="https://firstsiteguide.com/cyberbullying-stats/#:~:text=Internet%20trolls%20are%20most%20active,%2C%20chat%20rooms%2C%20and%20blogs.">https://firstsiteguide.com/cyberbullying-stats/#:~:text=Internet%20trolls%20are%20most%20active,%2C%20chat%20rooms%2C%20and%20blogs.</a> <a href="https://cyberbullying.org/2021-cyberbullying-data">https://cyberbullying.org/2021-cyberbullying-data</a>	

The information presented in the above given table clearly shows that 12.1 per cent of youth are harassed by sexual remarks, 20.1 per cent by online rumours and 22.5 per cent by mean comments. While there are 45.3 per cent of youth who are harassed online by other ways.

**Table 5. Cyberbullying of LGBT+ Youth**

Type of cyberbullied	Percent of LGBT+ Youth cyberbullied
Online Threats	35
Hate speech	58
Source: Cyberbullying Statistics, Facts and Trends, 2023, <a href="https://netsanity.net/blog/">https://netsanity.net/blog/</a> <a href="https://firstsiteguide.com/cyberbullying-stats/#:~:text=Internet%20trolls%20are%20most%20active,%2C%20chat%20rooms%2C%20and%20blogs.">https://firstsiteguide.com/cyberbullying-stats/#:~:text=Internet%20trolls%20are%20most%20active,%2C%20chat%20rooms%2C%20and%20blogs.</a>	

As presented in the above table, 35 per cent of youth belonging to LGBT+ community get online threats while 58 per cent of them are bullied by the hate speech.

**Table 6. Impacts of online harassment and trolling**

Impacts of Online Harassment and Trolling	Percent of Netizens
Social Anxiety	41
Depression	37
Suicidal thoughts	26
Deleted Profile from Social Media	26
Self-harmed	25
Refrained from Social Media	25
Eating Disorder	14
Drugs or alcohol addiction	9
Source: <a href="https://www.ditchthelabel.org/cyber-bullying-statistics-what-they-tell-us">https://www.ditchthelabel.org/cyber-bullying-statistics-what-they-tell-us</a> <a href="https://www.nveee.org/statistics/">https://www.nveee.org/statistics/</a>	

As reported by Ditch the Label, online harassment and trolling resulted into Social Anxiety among 41 per cent of netizens while 37 per cent of them slipped in depression. Whereas, 26 percent of online users had a suicidal thoughts resulted from online harassment and trolling. There were 26 percent of netizens who had deleted their social media profile and 25 per cent of them had harmed themselves. While 14 per cent of social media users had developed eating disorder and 9 per cent of them became drugs/alcohol addicted.



**Table 7. Percent of teenagers who became the victims of online harassment and trolling**

Country	Year		
	2018	2016	2011
India	37	32	32
Brazil	29	19	20
United States	26	34	15
Belgium	25	13	12
South Africa	26	25	10
Malaysia	23	n/a	n/a
Sweden	23	20	14
Canada	20	17	18
Turkey	20	14	5
Saudi Arabia	19	17	18
<a href="https://ceoworld.biz/2018/10/29/countries-where-cyber-bullying-was-reported-the-most-in-2018/">https://ceoworld.biz/2018/10/29/countries-where-cyber-bullying-was-reported-the-most-in-2018/</a>			

As reported above, there were 37 per cent of Indian teenagers who experienced online harassment and trolling in 2018 while 29 per cent of teenagers from Brazil became the victims of online harassment and trolling. In the same line, there were 26 per cent of teenagers from United States who went through online trolling and harassment.

**Table 8. People harassed on Social Media in year 2023**

Americans harassed on social media	Percent
Adults	52
LGBQ+ people	47
Black/African Americans	47
Muslims	47
Jewish People	80
Teens	51
Transgenders	76
Source: Online Hate and Harassment: The American Experience 2023 <a href="https://www.adl.org/resources/report/online-hate-and-harassment-american-experience-2023#:~:text=Among%20adults%2C%2052%25%20reported%20being,%25%20to%2051%25%20for%20teens.">https://www.adl.org/resources/report/online-hate-and-harassment-american-experience-2023#:~:text=Among%20adults%2C%2052%25%20reported%20being,%25%20to%2051%25%20for%20teens.</a>	

The above table depicts the facts that in the United States of America, the per cent of Adults, LGBQ+ people, Black/African Americans, Muslims, Jewish, Teens, and Transgender harassed on social media were 52, 47, 47, 47, 80, 51, and 76 respectively in 2023.

**Table 9. Harassment experienced by Americans in 2023 (in terms of %)**

Year	Percentage of American who experienced online harassment
2020	44
2021	41
2022	40
2023	52
Source: YouGov Survey on behalf of ADL <a href="https://www.adl.org/resources/report/online-hate-and-harassment-american-experience-2023#:~:text=Among%20adults%2C%2052%25%20reported%20being,%25%20to%2051%25%20for%20teens.">https://www.adl.org/resources/report/online-hate-and-harassment-american-experience-2023#:~:text=Among%20adults%2C%2052%25%20reported%20being,%25%20to%2051%25%20for%20teens.</a>	

The information as presented in the above table clearly depicts that there were 52 per cent of Americans who had gone through online harassment in the year 2023 which was 40 per cent in the year 2022.

**Table 10. No. of Cybercrime related to Sexual Harassment and Exploitation across India.**

Year	No. of Cyber Crime related to Sexual harassment and exploitation across India
2016	51
2017	81
2018	2030
2019	2266
2020	3293
2021	4555
2022	3434

Source: India; FICCI; EY; NCRB (India), 2016 to 2022

Statista 2023

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/875912/india-number-of-cyber-crimes-related-to-sexual-harassment/#:~:text=There%20were%20over%203.4%20thousand,the%20year%202016%20and%202017.>

From the above statistics, it can be concluded that as the incidents of cybercrime especially sexual harassment and exploitation have been increasing over the period of years. In 2021, the highest number of such incidents were reported. However, there was a slightly fall in 2022.

**Table 11 Most common reasons for online hate experienced by Asian adults living in the United States as of March 2021**

Reasons for Online Hate	Experienced Online Harassment (%)	Witnessed Online Harassment against Others (%)
Race / Ethnicity	75	90
Physical Appearance	57	73
Gender	42	61
Political Views	29	68
Religion	29	47
Sexual Orientation	23	59
Occupation	17	28
Disability	11	37

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1227773/online-harassment-asian-adults-usa/>

The above table gives an account of the per cent of Asian Adults who were harassed online and the per cent of Asians Adults who witnessed online harassment against others for different reasons. As of March 2021, the total per cents of Asian Adults who were harassed because of their race/ethnicity, physical appearance, gender, political views, religion, sexual orientation, occupation, and disability were 75, 57, 42, 29, 29, 23, 17, and 11 respectively. There were 90 per cent of Asian adults who witnessed online harassment against others due to their race/ethnicity. Similarly, 73 per cent of them witnessed online harassment against others because of their physical appearance.

**Table 12. Number of Cyber Stalking and Bullying Incidents reported against women across India in 2022**

State	Number of Incidents Reported
Maharashtra	52
Kerala	30
Rajasthan	19
Andhra Pradesh	13
Madhya Pradesh	13
Uttar Pradesh	10
Telangana	4

Himachal Pradesh	3
Gujarat	3
Delhi	3
Chhattisgarh	2
Source: <a href="https://www.statista.com/statistics/1097724/india-cyber-stalking-bullying-cases-against-women-children-by-leading-state/">https://www.statista.com/statistics/1097724/india-cyber-stalking-bullying-cases-against-women-children-by-leading-state/</a>	

In 2022, the maximum number of cyber stalking and bullying incidents against women were reported in Maharashtra (52) followed by Kerala (30). In Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, the similar types of cases reported were 19, 13, 13, and 10 respectively.

## 11. Recommendations

- The incidents of online toxicity need to be reported and the serious note of such incidents are required to be taken. Netizens should be encouraged to report such incidents fearlessly and without any hesistance.
- Internet users should be sensitized about the sensitivity of toxic behaviour and also be prepared as to how to deal with online trolls and harassment.
- The victims should be counselled appropriately in order to prevent the serious consequences such as depression, mental trauma, suicidal thoughts and so on.
- A caveat against undesirable online behaviour should be issued and also be negatively reinforced if found.

## 12. Limitations of Research Study & Scope for Future Research

The present study lacks the inclusion of primary data. The inference was drawn based on the analysis of secondary data. The researcher suggests the agenda for the future research in the same field. A comprehensive research study based on primary data can be undertaken to give more insights to the present study. The method of the research should include collection of pertinent firsthand information from both victims and witnesses of the online toxicity. Moreover, the future research may culminate the interview with those who invariably behave in a toxic manner and spread hatred on digital platform. Besides, a psychological aspect can also be added to the future research study.

## 13. Conclusion

Online toxicity is the flip side of the digital culture. In most of the cases, immaturity, sadistic pleasure, vengeance, existance crisis, malice intentions are the reasons behind such undesirable behaviour. In fact, the widespread of digital culture has resulted into an exponential rise in such incidents. Unfortunately, sometimes such cases remain unreported because there are some victims who tend hesitate to befitingly respond due to pressure, threat, humiliation, no support etc. Generally, celebrities, social media influencers women, people from LGBTQ+ community, politicians are targeted on social media. Now it's a high time to have a separate legal framewok to keep this toxic behaviour under control. At the same, internet users need to sensitize about this crucial issue.

## References

1. Al-Adhaileh, M. H., Aldhyani, T. H., & Alghamdi, A. D. (2023). Online Troll Reviewer Detection Using Deep Learning Techniques. *Hindawi Applied Bionics and Biomechanics*, 1-11. Retrieved from <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/abb/2022/4637594/>
2. Cook, C., Schaafsma, J., & Antheunis, M. (2018). Under the bridge: An in- depth examination of online trolling in the gaming context. *new media & society*, 20(9), 3323–3340. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1461444817748578>
3. Deshmukh, N. C., & Sonune, P. (2020). Trolling of Women on Social Media: Some Reflections. *Our Heritage*, 68(57), 237-241.
4. Fichman, P., & Sanfilippo, M. R. (2016). *Online trolling and its perpetrators: Under the cyberbridge*. Rowman & Littlefield.



- 5.Khalaf, A. M., Alubied, A. A., Khalaf, A. M., & Rifaey, A. (2023). The Impact of Social Media on the Mental Health of Adolescents and Young Adults: A Systematic. *Cureus*, 15(8)(8). doi:10.7759/cureus.42990
- 6.Molenda, Z. M., Rogoza, M., & Michalski, P. G. (2022). What Makes an Internet Troll? On the Relationships Between Temperament (BIS/BAS), Dark Triad, and Internet Trolling. *Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 16(5), 1-23. doi:10.5817/CP20225-11
- 7.Pandey, M. (2020). AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ON EXISTING LEGAL REMEDIES RELATED TO INTERNET TROLLING IN INDIA AND ITS LOOPHOLES. *AN INTERNATIONAL BILINGUAL PEER REVIEWED REFEREED RESEARCH JOURNAL*, 10(40), 145-150.
- 8.Papapicco, C., & Quatera, I. (2019). "Do not make to eat to troll!": The dark side of web. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 9(2). doi:10.29333/ojcm/5764
- 9.Salian, T., & Ghosh, M. (2022). Decoding the Internet Trolls and their Implications on Female YouTubers. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 24(1), 1-12. Retrieved from <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol24/iss1/22/>