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**DIGITAL JUSTICE AND FEMINIST RESISTANCE: DALIT WOMEN'S
NEGOTIATION OF AI, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND CYBER-VIOLENCE WITHIN
INDIA'S LEGAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORKS**

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Keywords	Abstract
<i>Dalit Feminism; Digital Justice; Cyber-Violence; Artificial Intelligence; Social Media; Legal Frameworks; Human Rights; Intersectionality; Digital Divide; Online Harassment.</i>	<p>This article examines the intersections of Dalit feminism, digital technologies, and legal frameworks in contemporary India, focusing on how Dalit women navigate emerging forms of inequality and resistance within online spaces. The background of the study is rooted in the historical marginalization of Dalit communities and the persistence of caste-based and gendered discrimination, which increasingly extends into digital environments shaped by artificial intelligence, social media platforms, and data-driven governance. While digital technologies are often celebrated for democratizing expression, they simultaneously reproduce structural hierarchies through algorithmic bias, digital exclusion, and cyber-violence. Dalit women, in particular, encounter targeted online harassment, casteist abuse, and violations of privacy, raising critical questions about access to justice and the adequacy of existing legal protections.</p> <p>Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary research design, combining textual analysis of legal frameworks (including</p>



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IT laws and human rights provisions), critical discourse analysis of digital platforms, and engagement with Dalit feminist scholarship. An intersectional analytical framework is employed to examine how caste, gender, class, and digital access interact within technological and legal systems. The study also draws on case-based illustrations of online harassment and activism to highlight lived experiences and strategies of negotiation.

The analysis demonstrates that Dalit women exercise agency through digital activism, strategic visibility, and community-building, even within hostile online environments. However, their capacity to claim rights remains constrained by gaps in legal enforcement, institutional bias, and the inadequacy of cyber laws in addressing caste-based digital violence. The article argues that legal frameworks often fail to recognize the intersectional nature of online harm, thereby limiting effective redress. In conclusion, the study proposes that achieving digital justice requires a feminist and intersectional reconfiguration of legal and policy approaches. Strengthening cyber laws, ensuring accountability of digital platforms, and promoting inclusive digital access are essential for addressing systemic inequalities. Dalit feminism emerges as a critical framework for understanding and transforming the relationship between technology, law, and social justice in India.

1. Introduction

Dalit feminism in contemporary India has emerged as a critical intellectual and political framework that foregrounds the intersection of caste and gender in shaping women's lived experiences. Unlike mainstream feminist approaches that often universalize women's issues, Dalit feminism highlights the specific forms of oppression faced by Dalit women, rooted in historical exclusion, social hierarchy, and systemic discrimination (Rege, 2006). It emphasizes the need to understand agency, resistance, and identity through the lens of caste-based inequalities, thereby expanding the scope of feminist discourse in India.

In recent decades, the rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed the nature of public engagement, creating new "online public spheres" where individuals and communities can express, mobilize, and contest dominant narratives. Social media platforms, digital communication tools, and AI-driven systems have enabled marginalized voices, including Dalit women, to articulate experiences that were historically silenced or ignored. However, these digital spaces are not neutral; they are embedded within existing social structures and often reproduce inequalities through algorithmic bias, unequal access, and exclusionary practices (Noble, 2018).

The study of cyber-violence and digital justice has thus become increasingly significant. Dalit women face targeted forms of online harassment that combine casteist abuse with gendered violence,



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including threats, trolling, and privacy violations. These experiences raise important questions about the adequacy of legal protections, the role of digital platforms, and the broader implications for justice and equality. Examining these issues through a Dalit feminist perspective allows for a deeper understanding of how power operates in digital contexts and how resistance is negotiated within them.

2. Background and Context: Dalit Women in Digital India

The historical marginalization of Dalit communities in India is deeply rooted in the caste system, which has structured social, economic, and cultural life for centuries. Dalit women occupy a particularly vulnerable position within this hierarchy, experiencing what scholars describe as “triple marginalization”—on the basis of caste, gender, and class (Guru, 2009). Their access to education, resources, and public participation has historically been restricted, shaping their entry into modern institutions, including digital spaces.

With the expansion of digital platforms in India—driven by increased internet penetration, mobile technology, and state-led digital initiatives—new opportunities for communication and participation have emerged. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube have enabled Dalit women to share narratives, build networks, and engage in activism at local, national, and global levels. These platforms have facilitated the visibility of Dalit feminist discourse, allowing for the circulation of alternative knowledge and counter-public narratives (Paik, 2014).

However, this expansion has been uneven and marked by significant disparities in access. The digital divide in India is shaped by socioeconomic status, education, geography, and gender, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities. Dalit women, particularly in rural areas, often face limited access to devices, internet connectivity, and digital literacy, which restricts their ability to participate fully in digital spaces. As Warschauer (2003) argues, access to technology is not merely about infrastructure but also about social inclusion and capability.

These structural exclusions are further compounded by systemic biases within digital environments. Even when access is available, Dalit women encounter barriers such as language limitations, lack of representation, and hostile online environments. Thus, digital India reflects broader patterns of inequality, where technological advancement coexists with persistent social stratification.

3. Objectives

- To analyze the intersection of caste, gender, and digital technology in shaping Dalit women's online experiences.
- To examine the nature and forms of cyber-violence faced by Dalit women in India.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of existing legal and human rights frameworks in addressing digital inequalities and online harassment.



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- To explore the role of social media and AI in shaping representation, visibility, and bias.
- To understand Dalit women's strategies of negotiation, resistance, and digital activism.
- To propose feminist and intersectional approaches for achieving digital justice and inclusive policy reform.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary approach to examine Dalit feminism, digital technologies, and legal frameworks in India. Drawing from feminist studies, law, media studies, and sociology, it explores lived experiences, power structures, and digital spaces as sites of both inequality and resistance.

The research uses multiple data sources, including legal and policy documents, digital discourse from social media and online campaigns, and existing scholarly literature. Analytically, it is grounded in an intersectional Dalit feminist framework (Crenshaw, 1991; Rege, 2006), highlighting how caste, gender, class, and digital access intersect. The concept of negotiated agency is used to understand how Dalit women navigate constraints through strategy and resistance within digital and legal systems.

5. Legal and Human Rights Frameworks in India

India's legal framework addressing digital spaces is primarily anchored in the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000, along with its subsequent amendments and allied cyber laws. These provisions aim to regulate online conduct, prevent cybercrime, and ensure data security. Sections dealing with cyber harassment, identity theft, and offensive online content provide a formal mechanism for addressing digital harms. However, while these laws recognize generic forms of online abuse, they often fail to adequately capture the specificity of caste-based and gendered violence experienced by Dalit women. As a result, legal responses tend to remain limited in scope and effectiveness.

At the constitutional level, India guarantees fundamental rights such as equality (Article 14), non-discrimination (Article 15), and the right to life and dignity (Article 21), which extend to digital contexts. Additionally, legal instruments such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, provide protections against caste-based discrimination and violence. In principle, these frameworks can be invoked in cases of online caste abuse. However, the translation of these protections into digital enforcement remains inconsistent, reflecting broader challenges in institutional responsiveness and legal accessibility (Thorat & Newman, 2010).

Significant gaps persist in addressing caste-based digital violence. Existing cyber laws rarely recognize intersectional harm, where caste and gender operate simultaneously. Issues such as algorithmic bias, targeted casteist harassment, and online humiliation of Dalit women often fall into grey areas of legal interpretation. Moreover, procedural barriers, lack of awareness, and institutional



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bias discourage victims from seeking redress. As a result, the promise of digital justice remains uneven, revealing the limitations of current legal and human rights frameworks in addressing structurally embedded inequalities.

6. Theoretical Framework: Dalit Feminism, Digital Studies, and Law

This study is grounded in an intersectional framework that examines how caste, gender, class, and technology intersect to shape Dalit women's digital experiences. Intersectionality, as conceptualized by Crenshaw (1991), highlights the inadequacy of single-axis analyses in capturing complex forms of marginalization. In the Indian context, Dalit feminist scholars extend this framework by emphasizing caste as a central axis of power, demonstrating how digital spaces reproduce entrenched hierarchies while also offering avenues for resistance (Rege, 2006).

Feminist theories of digital space further inform the analysis by conceptualizing online platforms as contested terrains of power rather than neutral sites of communication. Digital technologies, including social media and artificial intelligence, are embedded within social, economic, and political structures, shaping visibility, representation, and access. Scholars such as Noble (2018) have shown how algorithmic systems can reinforce existing inequalities, privileging dominant groups while marginalizing others. For Dalit women, this translates into both limited visibility and heightened vulnerability to online abuse, situating digital spaces within broader regimes of power.

The concept of negotiated agency provides a critical lens to understand how Dalit women navigate these constraints. Rather than viewing agency solely as resistance or autonomy, this approach recognizes it as a process of strategic engagement within unequal structures (Mahmood, 2005). In digital contexts, Dalit women may simultaneously conform to, contest, and rework dominant norms to secure visibility, safety, and participation. This framework thus shifts the focus from binary notions of empowerment and oppression to a more nuanced understanding of how agency operates within layered systems of power.

7. Digital Literacy, Access, and the Digital Divide

Access to digital technologies in India remains deeply uneven, reflecting broader socioeconomic inequalities. While the expansion of internet connectivity and mobile technology has increased overall access, significant disparities persist along lines of caste, class, gender, and geography. Dalit communities, particularly women in rural areas, often face limited access to digital devices, stable internet connections, and digital education, restricting their participation in online spaces. As Warschauer (2003) argues, digital inclusion is not merely about physical access but also about the capacity to effectively use technology.

Socioeconomic and regional disparities further intensify the digital divide. Urban areas tend to have better infrastructure, higher digital literacy, and greater opportunities for engagement, while rural regions remain underserved. Economic constraints limit the ability of marginalized households to invest in digital tools, and educational inequalities affect the development of necessary skills. These



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structural barriers create a layered exclusion, where Dalit women are positioned at the margins of digital participation despite the rhetoric of “Digital India.”

Gendered barriers also play a critical role in shaping digital access and use. Social norms, family restrictions, and concerns about safety often limit women's engagement with technology. For Dalit women, these gendered constraints intersect with caste-based discrimination, further restricting their digital mobility. Even when access is available, the fear of online harassment and surveillance can discourage active participation. Thus, the digital divide is not only a question of infrastructure but also of power, reflecting how social hierarchies are reproduced within technological domains.

8. Social Media and Dalit Feminist Expression (Short Version)

Social media platforms have become important spaces for Dalit feminist expression, enabling marginalized voices to challenge dominant narratives and share lived experiences of caste and gender oppression. These platforms act as sites of both voice and resistance, where personal narratives are transformed into political critique and gain wider visibility (Paik, 2014). However, digital spaces are not neutral, as visibility is often shaped by power structures and platform algorithms (Noble, 2018).

Digital activism has created online communities that transcend boundaries, fostering solidarity through campaigns and collective storytelling, forming “counter-publics” (Fraser, 1990). Yet, these spaces remain constrained by platform control and social hostility. Representation and narrative control continue to be central, as Dalit women negotiate their visibility against stereotypes and marginalization, making social media a contested space of voice and struggle (Rege, 2006).

9. Cyber-Violence and Online Harassment

Cyber-violence against Dalit women reflects the intersection of caste-based and gendered oppression in digital spaces. Forms of abuse include casteist slurs, sexualized threats, and targeted harassment aimed at silencing dissenting voices. Such violence is not incidental but structurally embedded, mirroring offline hierarchies within online environments. As Banaji and Bhat (2019) note, digital platforms often reproduce social prejudices, enabling the circulation of hate speech and discriminatory content.

Trolling, doxxing, and threats constitute common mechanisms of online harassment. Dalit women activists and scholars frequently face coordinated attacks that aim to intimidate and delegitimize their participation in public discourse. Doxxing—where personal information is exposed—poses serious risks to safety, while persistent trolling creates a hostile environment that discourages engagement. These practices are facilitated by the relative anonymity of digital platforms and the lack of effective moderation systems.

The psychological and social impact of such violence is profound. Experiences of online harassment can lead to stress, anxiety, and withdrawal from digital spaces, thereby limiting opportunities for expression and participation. As Citron (2014) argues, cyber-violence undermines not only individual



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well-being but also democratic engagement by silencing marginalized voices. For Dalit women, the cumulative effect of caste and gender-based abuse intensifies these consequences, reinforcing patterns of exclusion.

10. Artificial Intelligence and Algorithmic Bias

Artificial intelligence systems play an increasingly important role in shaping digital experiences, from content recommendation to moderation. However, these systems are not neutral; they often reflect and reproduce structural inequalities embedded in their design and data. As Noble (2018) demonstrates, algorithmic systems can privilege dominant groups while marginalizing others, reinforcing existing hierarchies of visibility and representation.

Bias in content moderation and algorithmic visibility has significant implications for Dalit women. Automated systems may fail to adequately detect caste-based abuse due to limited contextual understanding, allowing harmful content to persist. At the same time, content produced by marginalized groups may receive less visibility, limiting its reach and impact. This creates a dual problem of under-protection and under-representation within digital platforms.

The implications for Dalit women's representation are substantial. Algorithmic bias can shape which voices are amplified and which are suppressed, influencing public discourse and knowledge production. As O'Neil (2016) argues, such systems can function as "weapons of math destruction," perpetuating inequality under the guise of objectivity. Addressing these issues requires critical engagement with the design and governance of AI systems, ensuring that they account for intersectional forms of discrimination.

11. Legal Responses and Institutional Challenges

The effectiveness of cyber laws in addressing digital violence remains limited, particularly in cases involving intersectional discrimination. While existing legal frameworks provide mechanisms for addressing online harassment, their implementation is often inconsistent. As Srivastava (2020) notes, gaps in enforcement, lack of awareness, and procedural complexities hinder the ability of victims to seek justice. This is especially pronounced for Dalit women, who may face additional barriers related to caste and socioeconomic status.

Barriers to legal redress include difficulties in reporting cybercrimes, lack of digital literacy, and limited access to legal resources. Institutional processes can be slow and inaccessible, discouraging victims from pursuing formal complaints. Moreover, the burden of proof in cases of online harassment often falls on victims, further complicating the pursuit of justice.

Institutional bias and accountability issues exacerbate these challenges. Law enforcement agencies and judicial systems may lack sensitivity to caste-based discrimination, leading to inadequate responses. As Thorat and Newman (2010) highlight, systemic bias within institutions can undermine



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the effectiveness of legal protections. Consequently, the gap between legal provisions and lived realities remains significant, raising critical questions about accountability and reform.

12. Agency and Negotiation in Digital Spaces

Despite structural constraints, Dalit women actively engage in strategies of resistance and adaptation within digital environments. These strategies include selective participation, anonymity, and the use of alternative platforms to navigate hostile spaces. As Mahmood (2005) argues, agency should be understood as a form of negotiation within power structures rather than outright resistance, a perspective that is particularly relevant in digital contexts.

Negotiation occurs at multiple levels, including interactions with platforms, legal systems, and broader society. Dalit women often balance the need for visibility with concerns about safety, adapting their online presence accordingly. They may engage in advocacy while simultaneously mitigating risks through strategic self-representation and community support.

Collective action and solidarity play a crucial role in sustaining digital engagement. Online communities provide spaces for mutual support, resource sharing, and collective resistance, enabling Dalit women to counter isolation and marginalization. These networks function as critical infrastructures of empowerment, reinforcing the capacity for sustained engagement despite structural challenges (Mohanty, 2003).

13. Discussion: Digital Justice and Feminist Resistance

The intersections of technology, law, and power reveal the complex dynamics shaping Dalit women's digital experiences. Digital spaces are not merely technological environments but are embedded within broader social and institutional structures that reproduce inequality. As Foucault (1980) suggests, power operates through dispersed networks rather than centralized authority, a concept that is evident in the functioning of digital platforms and legal systems.

Dalit feminism provides a critical framework for analysing these dynamics, emphasizing the need to account for caste as a central axis of power. By foregrounding intersectionality, it challenges dominant narratives that overlook the specificity of Dalit women's experiences. This perspective enables a more nuanced understanding of digital justice, moving beyond universalist assumptions to address structural inequalities.

Rethinking justice in digital environments requires a shift from formal legal equality to substantive and intersectional justice. This involves recognizing the limitations of existing frameworks and developing approaches that address the complexity of digital harm. As Fraser (2008) argues, justice must encompass redistribution, recognition, and representation—principles that are essential for addressing digital inequalities.



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14. Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis demonstrates that digital spaces in India are marked by both opportunities and constraints for Dalit women. While social media and digital technologies enable new forms of expression and activism, they also reproduce existing hierarchies through cyber-violence, algorithmic bias, and unequal access. Legal frameworks, though present, remain insufficient in addressing the intersectional nature of digital harm.

Policy recommendations include strengthening cyber laws to explicitly address caste-based digital violence, improving enforcement mechanisms, and ensuring accountability of digital platforms. There is also a need to promote digital literacy and access among marginalized communities, addressing structural barriers that limit participation. Additionally, integrating intersectional perspectives into policy design can enhance the effectiveness of legal and institutional responses.

Future research should focus on empirical studies of Dalit women's digital experiences, exploring regional variations and evolving technological contexts. Further engagement with emerging technologies such as AI and data governance is also necessary to understand their long-term implications. Ultimately, achieving digital justice requires a sustained commitment to addressing structural inequalities and supporting marginalized voices within digital and legal frameworks.

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