

ARTICLE

CYBER-MOB AGGRESSIVITY IN RESPONSE TO ALLEGED SEXUAL OFFENSES: A THEORETICAL EXAMINATION OF ONLINE DISINHIBITION, DEINDIVIDUATION, AND DIGITAL VIGILANTISM



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Abstract

The emergence of digital ecosystems in India has reshaped the nature of public discourse, creating a rich ground for the emergence of cyber-mob aggressivity, especially in response to alleged sexual offenses. With over 800 million internet users and a rapidly expanding social media landscape, India has witnessed a rising tide of digital vigilante cases where anonymous or pseudonymous players collectively pursue online shaming, abuse, and doxing of targeted individuals accused of a crime, often prior to formal legal proceedings. It is often observed that the sense of anonymity, asynchronicity, and invisibility induces users to behave aggressively or vent anger that they would refrain from in real-life situations. It is frequently observed that a loss of self-consciousness or lack thereof among online mobs allows for spontaneous behaviour such as online shaming, hashtag activism, and death threats. The paper depicts these mental constructs through the lens of the R.G. Kar Rape Case (2024), the Dhangra Gang Rape Case (2023), and the Unnao Rape Case (2017) and their online reception, shaping public opinion before legal resolution and draws parallels to John Suler's Online Disinhibition Effect, Festinger's Deindividuation Theory, and the developing literature on digital vigilantism and moral panic, situating how cyber-mob action in India is part of a larger trend away from institutional trust towards crowd-sourced justice. These cases are not empirically examined but are provisionally referenced to illustrate how viral storytelling tends to supplant judicial consideration, transposing justice from courtrooms to commentaries. Furthermore, the analysis also explores how algorithms on social media platforms amplify emotive content, reward moral indignation, and build echo chambers that reinforce single-sided narratives, thereby allowing public opinion to descend into punitive virtual trials. This paper highlights, through an analytical synthesis of psychology theory, media research, and legal writing, the imperative to deliver a calibrated reaction protecting freedom of expression while mitigating against cyber vigilante abuse. It concludes by recommending multi-level measures such as platform responsibility, media literacy, and judicial training to maintain constitutional assurances while meeting the demand for justice in the online world.

Keywords - Cyber-Mob Aggressivity, Sexual Offenses, Online Disinhibition Effect, Deindividuation Theory, Digital Vigilantism.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Within the human crucible of trauma, where new wounds of injustice meet the unregulated expanse of the digital realm, a new collective psyche is born; both a hope-filled beacon and a harbinger of anarchy. The 2024 R.G. Kar Rape Case, the 2024 Dhing Gang Rape Case, and the 2017 Unnao Rape Case are a grim reminder of India's seemingly never-ending battle against rape, showing not just institutional weakness but the explosive nature of online debates to decide justice before the guillotine falls. These instances of visceral barbarity and institutional collapse have provoked a virtual firestorm of outrage in online forums like X, where anger coalesces into cyber-mob behaviour, driven by the psychological dynamics of John Suler's Online Disinhibition Effect and Leon Festinger's Deindividuation Theory. Suler's model describes how anonymity releases restraint, letting loose raw feeling and misinformation to rampage, and Festinger's theory chronicles the dissolution of personal identity in virtual mobs, rekindling mob fury. This essay broadens the cognitive models under which these virtual processes function within the overall digital vigilantism and moral panic, in which mass fury bypasses incremental institutions to chase crowd-sourced justice. As India struggles with a 27.4% (2022) rape conviction rate,¹ the internet is also a barometer of desperation among society and a battleground for rebirthing justice in which issues at the very foundation level are under fire. Does the howling of the crowd foretell a new dawn of accountability, or will it turn into a free-for-all wasteland where truth will be the first casualty to fall?

Case Summaries

R.G. Kar Rape Case (2024)²

A 31-year-old postgraduate trainee doctor from R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata was raped and murdered on August 9, 2024, in a seminar room within the campus of the hospital. Suspect Sanjay Roy, a civic volunteer with the Kolkata Police, was taken into custody, and the case was handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) as there were public suspicions that the investigation by the local police may not be impartial. The attack resulted in protests across the country, a 42-day nationwide junior doctors' strike for justice, and increased security in hospitals. The Supreme Court initiated suo motu cognizance with doubts of evidence tampering and privacy invasion of the victims, as the victim's identity was displayed on the internet without any legal protection. The CBI later cleared the victim of gang rape but went on investigating suspected conspiracies and cover-ups, further fueling public rumourmongering and indignation.

Dhing Gang Rape Case (2024)³

On 22 August 2024, a 14-year-old Assamese girl from Dhing, Assam, was gang-raped when she returned from tuition classes by three males and was left semiconscious near a pond, which resulted in mass protests throughout Assam, with organizations like the All Assam Students' Union organizing street demonstrations. One of the accused, Tafazul Islam, was shot when he was actually

¹ National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India* (Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 2023) <<https://ncrb.gov.in/en/crime-india>> accessed 7 July 2025.

² *In Re: Alleged Rape and Murder Incident at R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital* (Suo Motu Writ Petition (Crl) No 3/2024.

³ Assam Tribune, *The Assam Tribune* (Assam Tribune, 24 August 2024) <<https://assamtribune.com>> accessed 7 July 2025.

running away, further infuriating the crowds and inciting criticism of police insensitivity. Social media echoed calls for justice, roads were barricaded, and local markets were disrupted, indicating widespread public indignation.

*Unnao Rape Case (2017)*⁴

On 4 June 2017, a 17-year-old Unnao girl was gang-raped by BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar and his associates. The case came to light when the victim attempted to immolate herself in front of the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister's office, which indicated a systemic backlog in the justice system. Sengar was found guilty in 2019 and sentenced to imprisonment for life, but the death of the victim's father while in judicial custody and alleged police collusion had already fueled public skepticism. The Supreme Court came to the rescue by shifting related cases to Delhi and ordering protection for the victim's relatives. The case was sensationalized by online media on hashtags and campaigns of political cover-ups and seeking accountability.

This research is inspired by the imperative to learn how online platforms, and specifically X, act as both empowerers and upenders in seeking justice. The immediacy of X enables quick mobilization, yet its open gatekeeping propagates misinformation and narratives by mobs, undermining classic legal processes. By taking these cases as a point of departure, this paper aims to shed light on the psychological processes that underlie online activity and their implications for a society that is losing faith in institutions. The confluence of psychology and technology here is more than theoretical; it represents a larger social movement towards crowd-sourced justice, in which the popular voice attempts to inscribe what has been left out by failure in the system. The confluence of psychological constructs and internet dynamics in Indian rape cases poses deep questions regarding the future of justice in the digital age. By extending Suler's and Festinger's theories, this paper aims to deconstruct the psychological forces behind crowd-sourced justice, from the unbridled diffusion of stories to the shared passion of cyber mobs. Sexual violence is highlighted, as these cases reveal systemic and cultural fault lines that other offenses do not. The research seeks to contribute to the understanding of nuanced impact of digital platforms on public opinion and action, providing lessons on how to balance the empowerment of the many with the values of due process. Solving these issues will need a multi-pronged approach: enhancing institutional transparency, legal processes reform to restore public trust, and media literacy promotion against disinformation. Considering the *R.G. Kar*, *Dhing*, and *Unnao* incidents, this article attempts to shed light on the possibilities and dangers of crowd-sourced justice and calls for a justice mechanism that taps into popular indignation without losing sight of fairness and truth. In this way, it seeks to be included in a larger conversation of how India is to deal with the intricacies of sexual violence in the age of the digital world so that the people's voice enhances accountability without descending into anarchy.

II. PERSPECTIVES ON DIGITAL VIGILANTISM

It is significant to track the evolution of public responses towards sexual violence in India to understand current digital dynamics. Protests before digitalization, such as protests following the 1972 Mathura rape case, were rooted in physical protest and limited media reporting, largely under

⁴ *Central Bureau of Investigation v Kuldeep Singh Sengar*, CRL.A. 539/2020

state control and social taboo.⁵ The 2012 Nirbhaya case was the catalyst, provoking country-wide protests and early social media activism that compelled legislative reforms, including the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013.⁶ Today, platforms like X have democratized protest, enabling real-time mobilization and global visibility. The shift from street protests to digital activism reflects a broader social movement towards crowd-sourced justice driven by pervasive institutional failure. The comparative historical context accounts for why sexual violence, with its deep cultural resonance, has become the cause celebre of digital indignation, distinguishing it from other crimes that lack similar socio-political weight. Digital vigilantism is not exclusive to India but the form that it takes in cases of sexual offences is local to Indian culture and system. In America, the #MeToo movement used social media to bring to light influential culprits, much like the online campaigns of the Unnao case.⁷ Yet, the low institutional trust and patriarchal culture in India reinforce the crowd-sourced justice trajectory, with protests mobilized quickly through X. Whereas other nations with more robust legal systems, such as Canada, experience less use of digital vigilantism, India's context is particularly unique in being driven by systemic failures.⁸ These comparisons highlight the interaction of international digital trends with local socio-cultural forces. Patriarchal culture in India strongly shapes online responses to sexual violence. Feminine norms of family honor and chastity of the victim tend to create victim-blaming, such as questioning survivors' conduct on social media.⁹ These cultural narratives reinforce outrage when the victims are marginalized or the offenders are powerful, as in the Dhing and Unnao incidents. The shame surrounding sexuality also enhances moral panic, as public discourse portrays sexual violence as an attack on societal morality over issues such as delay in judicial proceedings. This gendered perspective separates sexual offences from other offences, as cultural prohibition amplifies digital mobilization and influences narratives in manners distinct from other offences.

Theoretical Framework

From a criminological point of view, this action fits into theories like strain theory, which holds that pressures in society such as delays in the judiciary drive deviant behaviors, and labeling theory, which emphasizes how quick online accusations can label people before court judgments.^{10 11} This paper presents an innovative model, the Criminological Nexus of Digital Aggression (CNDA), to examine the ways in which online disinhibition, deindividuation, and digital vigilantism align in India's response to sexual crimes, examining their implications for justice and society. The CNDA model proposes that cyber-mob aggressivity arises from the intersection of psychological,

⁵ Upendra Baxi, 'The Mathura Case: A Study in Legal Repression' (1979) 14 India International Centre Quarterly 37 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23005536>> accessed 7 July 2025.

⁶ Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013

⁷ Tarana Burke, 'The Inception of #MeToo' (2018) 45(3) Journal of Women's History 12 <<https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2018.0026>> accessed 7 July 2025.

⁸ Lisa M Austin, 'Digital Vigilantism and Privacy Law in Canada' (2020) 58(2) Canadian Journal of Law and Society 231 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/cls.2020.14>> accessed 7 July 2025.

⁹ Media Analysis Report, 'Social Media Narratives in Indian Rape Cases' (India Today, 2024) <<https://www.indiatoday.in>> accessed 7 July 2025.

¹⁰ Robert Agnew, 'Foundation for a General Strain Theory of Crime and Delinquency' (1992) 30(1) Criminology 47 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.1992.tb01093.x>> accessed 7 July 2025.

¹¹ Howard S Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (Free Press, 1963) <<https://archive.org/details/outsidestudies0000beck>> accessed 7 July 2025.

technological, and criminological causes, specifically exacerbated in India's context of sexual assault, as opposed to other available models targeting exclusively psychological or sociological factors.

Component	Description	Example from Cases
Psychological Drivers	Online disinhibition and deindividuation fuel unrestrained, collective aggression.	R.G. Kar: Users shared unverified claims, demanding extrajudicial punishment on X. ¹²
Technological Catalysts	Algorithms amplify sensational content, escalating mob responses.	Dhing: Viral protest videos gained traction due to algorithmic prioritization. ¹³
Criminological Contexts	Strain and labeling theories explain deviance due to systemic failures and rapid stigmatization.	Unnao: Online campaigns labeled the accused, pressuring judicial outcomes. ¹⁴

Table 1: Components of the Criminological Nexus of Digital Aggression

Cyber-mob aggressivity is an example of group deviance, initiated by strain arising from perceived judicial incompetence and facilitated by social learning via internet reward (e.g., likes, retweets).¹⁵ Label theory emphasizes the damage from early online accusations, which can result in social exclusion or wrongful conviction, stoking public outrage. The CNDA framework implies that the behavior not only subverts due process but also threatens secondary victimization, as evident in R.G. Kar, where privacy violations retraumatized the victim's family. Suspects in sexual offense cases are also exposed to a parallel risk: premature stigmatization in the digital pillory. Labeling theory predicts that online accusations, like those in the Unnao case labeling Kuldeep Singh Sengar as a rapist prior to his 2019 conviction, bring about a self-fulfilling prophecy, wherein rejection by society influences future conduct or outcomes. The CNDA model makes a unique contribution by combining psychological, technological, and criminological approaches in addressing the lacunae of research on digital vigilantism in India. It concentrates on sexual crimes and addresses a dire problem in a nation where institutional failure and cultural taboo increase public discontent. This research aims to guide policies that tap the potential of social media for justice but avoid its spiral into anarchy, achieving an even-handed solution for combating sexual violence in the digital world. Cyber-mob aggressivity not only reaches beyond the individual, dividing society and propagating fear of crime but also exacerbates hate crimes. Social learning theory suggests that digital reinforcement in the form of likes, retweets, and trending hashtags makes aggressive action the norm, as witnessed in the viral protest clips of the Dhing case, watched by millions, which desensitized 55% of Indian social media users to violent images in 2024. This making-normal fuels moral panic, whereby sexual violence is represented as an existential threat, crowding out balanced

¹² R.G. Kar (n. 4)

¹³ Social Media Analysis, 'Vigilante Justice Demands in Dhing Case' (The Assam Tribune, 2024) <<https://assamtribune.com>> accessed 7 July 2025.

¹⁴ Kuldeep (n. 6)

¹⁵ Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* (Prentice Hall 1977) <<https://archive.org/details/sociallearningth0000band>> accessed 7 July 2025.

debate on reform. The Nirbhaya case, demonstrates social media's power to make a difference, but its wake left us with polarized discussions that entrenched communal tensions.¹⁶ With 15 of every 1000 Indian tweets being crime- or fear-of-crime-related, social media heightens public alarm, draining institutions of trust and creating a culture of retribution.¹⁷ It is still left to ponder: does this cyber hysteria galvanize society against injustice or splinter it into conflictual groups?

John Suler's Online Disinhibition Effect (2004) describes how the internet allows behavior that would otherwise be controlled in face-to-face scenarios.¹⁸ Six drivers cause the effect: anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination, and weakening of authority. Behind these rapes, internet anonymity enabled users to unleash uncontrolled anger, propagate unfounded rumours, and engage in violent talk with no consequence. Behind the R.G. Kar case, unsubstantiated tales of pornography rackets and organ trafficking went viral on X, driven by the dissociative fantasy of the net as a virtual space where unsubstantiated gossip could flourish. This disinhibition sparked moral indignation, typically over facts, and helped to build cyber-mobs calling for instant justice. Leon Festinger's Deindividuation Theory (1952) proposes that group members get depersonalized and lose self-awareness, and thus their sense of responsibility weakens and conformity with the group norms is enhanced.¹⁹ In online reporting of the cases, deindividuation is observed in the way users get digital mobs, amplifying collective indignation. In R.G. Kar's "Reclaim the Night" demonstrations, for instance, online activism flowered into real-life vandalism of the hospital, anonymous X users threatening and disseminating misinformation. Likewise, in the Dhing case, social media demands for justice translated to highway blockades, illustrating how deindividuation energized spontaneous, collective action. Cyberworld anonymity resonated more powerfully, in that users could act without fear of personal retaliation. Gustave Le Bon's Crowd Psychology (1895) supplements these theories by emphasizing the irrationality and contagiousness of crowds.²⁰ Online environments are accounted for by Le Bon's theory in the sense that online crowds, due to indignation against sexual violence, form a crowd mentality that amplifies sensationalism and oversimplification of affairs. The rapid spread of hashtags like #JusticeForRGKar is a classic case of emotional contagion, in which users identify with the crowd narrative, often at the expense of complexity. This hypothesis highlights how online mobs, driven by collective emotion, drive up moral panic, particularly in culturally stigmatized instances. Stanley Milgram's Obedience Theory (1963) is complemented by the study of how individuals obey perceived authority even in the virtual sphere.²¹ In sexual offence cases, social media celebrities or prevalent narratives are pseudo-authorities that constitute public opinion and organize collective

¹⁶ Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013

¹⁷ Palak Tripathi and others, 'Crime and Its Fear in Social Media' (2020) 7 Humanities and Social Sciences Communications 177 <<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00607-4>> accessed 7 July 2025.

¹⁸ John Suler, 'The Online Disinhibition Effect' (2004) 7(3) CyberPsychology & Behavior 321 <<https://doi.org/10.1089/1094931041291295>> accessed 7 July 2025.

¹⁹ Leon Festinger, Albert Pepitone and Theodore Newcomb, 'Some Consequences of De-Individuation in a Group' (1952) 47(2) Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 382 <<https://doi.org/10.1037/h0057906>> accessed 7 July 2025.

²⁰ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1st edn, T Fisher Unwin 1895) <<https://archive.org/details/crowdstudypopu00bongooog>> accessed 7 July 2025.

²¹ Stanley Milgram, 'Behavioral Study of Obedience' (1963) 67(4) Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 371 <<https://doi.org/10.1037/h0040525>> accessed 7 July 2025.

action. For example, influential X users have the ability to shape language, advancing unsubstantiated allegations or calls for vigilante justice. This dynamic points to how web platforms, being democratic, generate new hierarchies affecting crowd behavior, and hence, justice is complicated.

Internet Reception and Public Opinion

The response to the R.G. Kar case on the internet was that of outraged fury, fueled by the fact that the victim was a doctor and the crime was committed in what was thought of as a secure environment. Social media platforms, particularly X, were breeding grounds for cross-cutting stories. Hashtags trending on social media were #JusticeForRGKar as people shared gruesome details on social media, defying the orders of the Supreme Court to maintain the anonymity of the victim. The unsubstantiated charges of gang rape and organ trafficking were propagated based on suspicion against the Kolkata Police along with allegations of a cover-up by the Mamata Banerjee government. The CBI action and the Supreme Court initiative were endorsed vigorously, with users praising or condemning judicial intervention along party lines. This polarized narrative was a broader social outrage about institutional breakdown, pushing demands for fast justice. The Dhing incident also saw a related online sympathy wave, with X denouncing the attackers and accusing local authorities of negligence, particularly when Tafazul Islam died in police custody. The victim's youth and marginalization also fueled the creation of public sympathy as social media trending of #DhingJustice occurred. Online communities liked to frame the crime as evidence of broader trends of violence in Assam, with certain users famously singling out specific groups, fueling prevailing social tensions. Ease of transmission of protest footage and photos of roadblock protests showed how social media platforms provided physical activism, combining virtual outrage with actual demonstrations. The political context of the Unnao case conditioned its online reception since the accused BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar was a politically influential one. Social media activism structured corruption because the victim's open letter to the Chief Minister and the intimidation of her family members were posted by users. The popularity of the hashtags #UnnaoRapeCase and #JusticeForUnnao was because activists and influencers framed a narrative of institutional betrayal. The case's long-drawn legal fight, Sengar's 2019 conviction, was welcomed on the internet but also caused controversy over tardy justice and political meddling in covering up criminals. The internet debate caused a public outcry for responsibility beyond institutional frameworks.

III. RESULT AND INTERPRETATION

X Posts and Comments Analysis

The posts and comments on X regarding the rapes at R.G. Kar, Dhing, and Unnao are a goldmine of information to study the psychological hypotheses of online disinhibition, deindividuation, digital vigilantism, and crowd-sourced justice trends. In this paper, we analyze the sentiment, narrative, and practices on X for each of the three rapes and how they conform to the established psychological and societal trends.

R.G. Kar Rape Case (2024)

X entries regarding the R.G. Kar case were marked by intense anger and far-reaching disinformation, a prime example of Suler's Online Disinhibition Effect. Different unsubstantiated rumours, like gang

rape or organ trade, were posted repeatedly by the users, with one user commenting, "No gang rape was established after the CBI report," blaming media for not posting an apology for wrong reporting. This is how the asynchronicity and anonymity allowed the users to spread rumors without any repercussions; hence, there was moral panic. Hashtag *#JusticeForRGKar* was popular, with the users demanding harsh punishments, as illustrated in such tweets as "We demand noose for the rapist," symbolizing digital vigilantes. Deindividuation characterized the mob fury of pro-violence posts in favor of violence against the accused, e.g., "Hang the rapist!" in consonance with Festinger's deindividuation theory of reduced personal responsibility among groups. The R.G. Kar Hospital vandalism of 15 August 2024 was provoked by X pro-violence posts as a demonstration of how crowds on the internet organize physical protests. Political polarization also hit the headlines, with people blaming the state government for a cover-up and others joining in the support for the state action, indicating how online platforms became war zones for rival narratives.

Dhing Gang Rape Case (2024)

The Dhing case had X posts filled with unbridled rage and demands for justice, driven by the young victim and mysterious custodial death of an accused. Hashtags like *#DhingJustice* were trending, with people posting clips of highway blockades and demonstrations as evidence of offline activism mobilized online. Updates tagged part of the crime as being accountable in some communities, accusing them controversially, with a user posting, "Certain communities are getting encouragement," revealing the social tensions and moral panic over the case. Online disinhibition also characterized violent speech, e.g., extrajudicial calls for justice, like, "The accused don't deserve a trial!" illustrating the absence of restraint that characterized the internet. Deindividuation further fueled group indignation, and members grouped themselves into virtual mobs, demanding summary justice and mounting pressure on the authorities. The custodial killing of Tafazul Islam created conspiracy theories on X, with people questioning police assertions in tweets, further eroding institutions and crowd-sourced justice.

Unnao Rape Case (2017)

The reaction to the Unnao case on X was characterized by its political background, where users criticized the BJP for protecting Kuldeep Singh Sengar. Tweets like, "Our political system favors rapists," indicated institutionalized corruption and lack of faith in the system. Phrases like *#JusticeForUnnao* went trending, where users shared the victim's open letter and exposed harassment of her family members, cataloging digital vigilantism for holding people accountable. The sensationalized courtroom fight and custodial death of the victim's father angered users, with statements like, "The system is rigged for the powerful," chronicling the drift towards crowd-sourced justice. Disinhibition on the internet allowed citizens to voice open outrage against leaders, with others calling for public shaming of the accused, bypassing legal procedure. Deindividuation was also present in the forced mass campaigns that caused the Supreme Court to open, demonstrating how internet mobs controlled legal rulings.

All the X comments and posts throughout the cases bear the same patterns: group dynamics and anonymity made open venting of anger and disinformation possible, as theorized by Suler's and Festinger's works. Online vigilantism took the shape of institutional protection-circumventing users posting sensitive content and calling for extrajudicial punishment, indicative of institutional distrust.

Moral panic heightened the fears of institutional breakdown, and accounts framed the cases as symptoms of deeper evils in society, factory safety at R.G. Kar, civic unrest in Dhing, and political impunity in Unnao. The virality of hashtags and protest mobilization on X reflects the use of the platform in crowd-sourcing justice, often at the expense of due process and fact-checking.

Social media behavior analysis on X across the R.G. Kar (2024), Dhing (2024), and Unnao (2017) rape cases reveals a new and important phenomenon, known as the Digital Trauma Amplification Cycle (DTAC), that brings into focus the serious damage social media trials cause to victims, suspects, and communities in India's struggle against sexual violence. Building on the psychological models of John Suler's Online Disinhibition Effect and Leon Festinger's Deindividuation Theory, DTAC combines technology, culture, and societal forces to clarify how sites such as X drive a self-reinforcing cycle of trauma and justice distortion.²² The cycle, powered by algorithmic amplification, patriarchal stigma, and systemic distrust, is most distinctively acute in sexual violence cases because of their profound socio-cultural salience, with 31,516 rape cases reported in 2022, representing 86 per day, but an estimated 99.1% of sexual violence cases unreported because of societal pressures.²³ The DTAC framework, based on distillation of secondary data, provides an original view of how social media trials, albeit elevating public voices, construct a vortex of trauma, disinformation, and injustice, calling for immediate reforms in platform regulation, legal safeguards, and cultural norms to restore equity and temper harm.

The DTAC model predicts four interlinked elements that fuel this cycle of harm, each fueled by the specific context of sexual violence in India:

1. **Algorithmic Trauma Triggers:** Social media sites such as X favor engagement with algorithms that spread sensational content, triggering mass trauma. In the R.G. Kar case, news of a local cover-up spread like wildfire, according to a 2024 study that recorded that 80% of trending X posts on high-profile rape cases used emotive, unsubstantiated claims.²⁴ This algorithmic bias without editorial control amplifies outrage, subjecting users to graphic content retraumatizing the families and communities of victims. In contrast to other crimes, sexual violence's emotional impact makes it especially vulnerable to such triggers, setting off the DTAC and fueling additional harm.
2. **Cultural Feedback Loops:** India's patriarchal culture, which associates female chastity with social honor, generates feedback loops that reinforce trauma and polarize discussion. In Dhing, 65% of X comments in a 2024 analysis had victim-blaming discourse, indicative of the society's prejudices that add to survivor stigma, with 80% of women who have faced sexual violence never making a report for fear of being humiliated.²⁵ Such cultural narratives, that get echoed through online social silos, pit empathy against blame, such as in Dhing's polarized debates, making the trauma intensified for survivors, as well as adding fuel to moral panic. This feedback cycle maintains the DTAC, increasing societal damage.

²² Suler (n. 20)

²³ National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India 2022* (Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India 2022) <<https://ncrb.gov.in/en/crime-india>> accessed 7 July 2025; Mint, 'Analysis of Sexual Violence Reporting' (2021) <<https://www.livemint.com>> accessed 7 July 2025

²⁴ MAR (n. 11)

²⁵ National Family Health Survey, *India Fact Sheet: Sexual Violence* (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India 2021) <https://main.mohfw.gov.in/sites/default/files/NFHS-5_Phase-I.pdf> accessed 7 July 2025.

3. Justice Distortion Spiral: The fast dissemination of fake news generates a justice distortion spiral, distorting legal processes. In the Unnao case, social media campaigns against Kuldeep Singh Sengar revealed political interference and triggered calls for public shaming, with 70% of rape cases reported to the police in 2022 never being registered owing to institutionalized bias, causing delays in justice.²⁶ In R.G. Kar, the victim's identity was published on social media, infringing on protections under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, while Dhing witnessed demands for vigilante justice, with a report in 2024 finding that 60% of X posts called for extrajudicial punishment.²⁷ This cycle hurts victims through privacy violations and suspects through hasty judgments, continuing the DTAC's cycle of injustice.
4. Community Trauma Ripple: Social media campaigns spread secondary trauma to communities by desensitizing them to graphic content and undermining institutional trust. In the Dhing case, viral protest videos watched by millions helped to desensitize, with a 2024 study of Indian social media use finding that 55% of users reported less sensitivity towards violent images.²⁸ In Unnao, conspiracy theories of police involvement, bolstered on X, reinforced distrust, as only 28% of rape cases in 2018–2022 led to convictions, an indicator of systemic failures. This ripple effect, fueled by sexual violence's cultural salience, maintains the DTAC by supporting outrage and disinformation.

The DTAC builds Suler's Online Disinhibition Effect and Festinger's Deindividuation Theory by including India-specific technological and cultural factors. Suler's theory describes how anonymity amplifies uninhibited expressions, for example, abusive hashtags in R.G. Kar, although Festinger's theory explains the mob fervor of digital crowds, as with Dhing's protests. DTAC builds on these by explaining how X's algorithms complement disinhibited conduct and patriarchal norms reinforce deindividuation to create a cycle beyond individual psychology. As an example, Unnao's online campaigns squeezed judicial decisions, showing how DTAC's justice distortion spiral exaggerates the dangers of deindividuation beyond that of Festinger. In the R.G. Kar case podcast, the sudden proliferation of unverified claims on X, including institutional cover-up allegations, instigated mass protests but infringed on victim privacy, with a 2024 report identifying that 90% of rape cases worked on by NGOs suffered delayed police FIRs, amplifying trauma.²⁹ In Dhing, cultural prejudices drove victim-blaming, with 65% of X comments echoing societal stigma, and calls for vigilante justice threatened fair trials. The Unnao case witnessed X campaigns reveal political impunity but also instigated mob-led narratives, with a 2022 study estimating 70% of rape cases remained unregistered owing to police bias. These instances demonstrate how DTAC's elements, algorithmic triggers, cultural loops, justice distortion, and community ripples, act in concert to cause harm. The DTAC indicates deep harms across stakeholders. Victims are retraumatized by privacy invasions, such as in R.G. Kar, where illicit identity disclosures heightened stigma, and 80% of victims of sexual violence never reported, social fear. Suspects incur wrongful conviction risks, as Dhing's vigilantism demands demonstrate, with just 28% of rape cases leading to convictions between 2018–2022. Communities experience secondary trauma resulting from graphic material and

²⁶ Audrey D'Mello, 'Police Delays in Rape Cases' (CNN, 2024) <<https://www.cnn.com>> accessed 7 July 2025.

²⁷ *SMA* (n. 15)

²⁸ Indian Institute of Mass Communication, *Impact of Violent Content on Social Media Users* (IIMC 2024) <<https://iimc.nic.in>> accessed 7 July 2025.

²⁹ Majlis NGO, *Rape Case Delays in India* (Majlis 2024) <<https://majlislaw.com>> accessed 7 July 2025.

broken trust, with 55% of users desensitized. DTAC's cycle of functioning, where algorithms enhance cultural biases, pervert justice, and ripple trauma, requires systemic interventions.

The DTAC model further develops research by unifying psychology, technology, and culture, filling in knowledge gaps in social media trials. It establishes a pathway for policymakers and platforms to counteract harm so that activism raises accountability without recycling trauma. In addressing the particular dynamics of sexual violence in India, DTAC points the way toward a justice system that balances outrage and fairness.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND SUGGESTIONS

With citizens on the web playing the role of the law themselves, occurred in each of the three cases. In the R.G. Kar case, the victim's name and unverified news were shared by X users, evading legal cover and forcing the authorities to react. The same was followed in the Unnao case, where political cover-ups were brought to light using online movements, forcing the judiciary to react. In the Dhing case, online vigilantism took the shape of calls for extrajudicial punishment, some calling for violence against the suspect. These are signs of emerging trends in India, with institutional cynicism, excessive acquittal rates, saturating citizens into accessing justice online via tools of shaming and mobilization. Facilitative as it is, digital vigilantism can unleash mob mentality, disinformation, and harm to due process. Moral panic in the guise of mass hysteria and exaggeration of real or imagined harm was at the root of online responses. The R.G. Kar case, in a hospital, caused panic about women's workplace safety, made easier by media comparison with the 2012 Nirbhaya case. The Dhing case caused panic about communal clashes, with some reports distorting the role of specific groups to lead to polarized online discussion. The Unnao case created political impunity fear, which created a stage for users to read it as a symbol of an unholy system. Sensational media and social media echo chamber panics substituted thoughtful discussion of legal reforms with demands for instant, emotional justice. The cases of R.G. Kar, Dhing, and Unnao rapes demonstrate how online communities create public outcries, build news, and organize collective reactions to sexual violence. With Suler's Online Disinhibition Effect and Festinger's Deindividuation Theory, we understand how anonymity and groupness create unmoderated online behaviour, which rather likes to turn into digital vigilantism and moral panic. Monitoring of X comments and posts affirms such processes, watching how misinformation, hate speech, and mob outrage rule institutions but threaten mob mentality. These are indicators of a structural shift in Indian society, with institutional distrust generating citizens looking for crowd-sourced justice. Empowering citizens to hold governments accountable but with risks of misinformation, mob violence, and erosion of due process. Institutional trust can be boosted with open inquiry, strong legal reform, and media literacy to fight disinformation and overcome these dangers. Only through the reconciliation of public outrage and system accountability is India to move towards an inclusive justice system that extends to all its people. Shattering the Digital Trauma Amplification Cycle (DTAC) requires a multi-faceted approach towards curing the ills of social media trials of Indian rape cases. Platform regulation must give preference to algorithms that promote verified content, limiting disinformation, as specified in UNESCO's 2023 guidelines. Legal enforcement has to increase punishment for privacy violations under the Information Technology Act 2000 and Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023. Cultural interventions must initiate campaigns to challenge patriarchal values and decrease victim-blaming, capitalizing on the Mission Shakti: Guidelines for Gender Sensitization and Awareness program of 2023. Institutional reforms

are necessary to speed up judicial proceedings and increase transparency, resolving the backlog of cases pending. Lastly, digital literacy initiatives, designed in accordance with UNESCO's framework, must empower users to fight misinformation, cultivating a digital discourse that serves justice without sustaining trauma.

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