



# “Will the law not protect survivors who don’t weep”: Twitter as a platform of feminist deliberation and democracy in India

new media &amp; society

1–20

© The Author(s) 2022

Article reuse guidelines:

[sagepub.com/journals-permissions](https://sagepub.com/journals-permissions)

DOI: 10.1177/14614448221113007

[journals.sagepub.com/home/nms](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/nms)**Paromita Pain** 

University of Nevada, Reno, USA

## Abstract

An analysis of 40,000 tweets that trended after the Tarun Tejpal acquittal in India showed that the nature of the debate around issues of molestation and rape exhibited attributes of deliberation and demonstrated that Twitter in India, in certain cases, has strong potential to emerge as a space for deliberative feminist activism. Discussions gave impetus to advocacy around sexual molestation. While the word “victim” was used in more instances rather than the human rights–based term “survivor,” Twitter debates were supportive toward survivors of assault. There was minimum trolling and patriarchy was called out as was a legal system that sided with the influential man of power. Although city-bred English-speaking voices dominated, conversations were intersectional in nature acknowledging how the horror of physical assault was perceived by different women belonging to disparate socio-economic strata and how legal systems exacerbated gender related crimes.

## Keywords

Deliberative democracy, feminist, India, #TarunTejpal, Twitter

## Introduction

In India, the #MeTooIndia movement has strongly and recently highlighted the insidious nature of sexual harassment in the workplace (Guha, 2021). The Tarun Tejpal case underlined, once again, just how persistent and inimical the dangers of sexual assault in

---

### Corresponding author:

Paromita Pain, University of Nevada, Reno, MS 310, 1664 N. Virginia St., Reno, NV 89557, USA.

Email: [paromita.pain@gmail.com](mailto:paromita.pain@gmail.com)

the professional sphere can be. Tejpal, the flamboyant editor of the muckraking investigative news magazine, *Tehelka*, raped a female journalist, many years his junior, and the assault, reported in 2013, finally, saw a verdict in 2021 that acquitted him. In a 527-page judgment, the ruling emphasized that, the survivor, in photos taken shortly after the incident did not “. . . look disturbed, reserved, terrified, or traumatized in any way even though this was immediately after she claims to have been sexually assaulted . . .” (Pandey, 2021). Instantly denounced as a “an injustice towards the victim . . .” (Shetye, 2021), this clearly biased and gender shaming decree was widely criticized with politicians, feminists, media, and civil society organizations raising questions about the revictimization of survivors, rape laws in the country, and outmoded judicial views against gender violence. Conversations with hashtags #TarunTejpalCase #TarunTejpal started trending since May 21, 2021, when Tejpal was absolved by an additional sessions judge at a fast-track court in Goa, India.

The Tarun Tejpal case is considered a “watershed moment” (Unnithan and Kiran, 2021) with the ruling centered between two significant waves of public protest and civic dialogue focused on the violence of gendered sexual assault: the December 2012 gangrape and murder in New Delhi and the resurgent #MeTooIndia movement in 2018. This is also among the first high-profile cases to be tried in the light of the changes made in laws related to sexual assault brought about by the Nirbhaya incident where the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2013 expanded the concept of rape to include a wider range of circumstances.

Analyzing Twitter debates and conversations, centered on this case, through the lens of deliberative democracy, this study investigates whether Twitter in India has the potential to be a strong and vibrant space for citizen voices and feminist activism and mark, if any, the transformations that may have been brought about by the brave and open nature of conversations surrounding assault and abuse in the workplace that the #MeTooIndia movement so crucially brought out into the open. Scholarship has shown how difficult deliberative democratic practice, especially in communication, can be (Ryfe, 2005) and yet deliberative and democratic participation is key to citizen engagement and to generate meaning to democratic ideals (Dahlgren, 2006). Williams et al. (2021) have emphasized how essential it is to investigate the consciousness of social media users to get an understanding of how those who participate online “feel their own place in current events, developing news stories, and various forms of civic mobilization” especially since social media can speed the processes of positive social change by influencing the ways in which gender issues are perceived and discussed by the public (Kim et al., 2012). Addressing the need for more research on conversations and activism on gender-based violence on social media in India (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2014; Pain, 2021) and building on prior research that showed how the #MeTooIndia movement was rife with trolling of participants and the subjugation of suburban voices (Nanditha, 2021), this article analyses the development of the Twitter space in India and its potential to be a space for deliberation and debate around the controversial #TarunTejpal ruling, sexual violence, and the rights of women in the country, and is among the earliest empirical studies examining gender violence-based communication on Twitter in India after the seminal #MeTooIndia movement.

## Literature review

### *Gender violence in India*

Gender violence is pervasive in India (Gurman et al., 2018) and is deeply affected by issues of underreporting and victim blaming (Eastal et al., 2015). On July 2020, the BBC reported that a high court judge had officially stated that he had found a survivor's statement "a bit difficult to believe" and that was "not the way our women react when they are ravished" (Pandey, 2021). Gendered political and patriarchal sexual correctness have created notions of victim behavior which increases risks of secondary victimization within legal systems which still operate via biased and extremely stereotypical perceptions of victim credibility and victim behavior (Bohner et al., 2013). Media coverage of survivors rarely shows much engagement with or analysis of issues as social incidents; women are often shamed, and reports rely on the sensational and often extend patriarchal viewpoints (Drèze and Sen, 2013). Female journalists, often socialized into prevalent patriarchal structures, are often insensitive (Fadnis, 2018) and perpetuate stereotypical understandings of rape rooted in patriarchal notions of gender using words like victims rather than the more rights-based "survivor." In such situations, Mendes et al. (2019) have emphasized that Tumblr and Twitter can produce "digitized narratives" of sexual violence that are often deeply personal and can help circulate feminist discourse that can effectively arrest cultures of rape and assault through creative interventions like hashtag activism, and invitations to mobilize and participate in different movements like the global SlutWalks (Mendes et al., 2019).

### *Twitter and hashtag feminism*

Twitter is no stranger to feminist activism in India. As the #MeTooIndia movement showed, that while Twitter as a space for hashtag activism can have many disadvantages, especially in the Indian context; often creating exclusionary spaces where certain voices gain more traction over others (Guha, 2021; Nanditha, 2021), there is little doubt that Twitter, in certain cases, has the potential to bring together activists, participants, and journalists which can lead to the enhancement of crucial dialogue related to feminist activism and the rights of minorities in the country. This was clearly seen in the Nirbhaya case when a young intern was raped in a moving bus in the capital city of Delhi and, later, left to die on the roadside (Poell and Rajagopalan, 2015) as well as the resurgent #MeTooIndia movement in 2018 where "After a year of fits and starts, India's #MeToo movement has leapt forward . . . , getting concrete action in two of the country's most powerful industries: entertainment and the news media" (Goel et al., 2018). Feminist tweets during March–August 2020 significantly emphasized gender-based violence using hashtags like #DomesticViolence and #ViolenceAgainstWomen (Dehingia and Raj, 2020). As Losh (2014) says, Twitter provided a new channel to publicize rape as "human rights abuse" (p. 1). Bearing further testimony to how social media can be an effective avenue to protest abuses is the #WomenofShaheenBagh hashtag that emerged as a symbol of strong gendered political protest led by hitherto marginalized subaltern Muslim women against the Indian government's Citizenship Amendment Act which involves proving citizenship in the country by minority groups (Edwards et al., 2021).

Participation and engagement on Twitter in India have been marred by nasty trolling (Amnesty International India, 2020) but research has also shown that when the issue is about sexual violence, Twitter can help activists and journalists connect in deeply meaningful ways that can transform public discourse on issues of gender rights (Guha, 2021; Poell and Rajagopalan, 2015). For example, the hashtag #LahukaLagaan (tax on menstruation) created to protest luxury taxes on sanitary napkins forced a repeal of the unfair decree (Fadnis, 2018).

In recent times, Twitter in India has made conscious efforts to engage with women's rights. In 2019, Twitter India had a week-long celebration honoring 50 rising women achievers at the #WebWonderWomen (WWW) event and profiled five women who have used Twitter to contribute to the conversation around feminism (BusinessLine, 2020). In 2019, Twitter India underwent a major overhaul incorporating seven local Indian languages; and claiming that nearly half of the tweets posted were in a "non-English language" (Mandavia and Krishnan, 2019) in a bid to increase participation. But Twitter's engagement with women and rights-based campaigns has not always been positive.

In 2017, #WomenBoycottTwitter that arose in support of Hollywood actor McGowan also saw women in India join the strike to protest the platform's anti-harassment stance. This was again an issue raised by Indian activists and participants of the #MeTooIndia who complained that the site was shadow banning their accounts when the men they publicly called out raised complaints (Pain, 2021). Amnesty International India's (2020) study that showed women politicians faced extreme trolling online was met with platitudes from Twitter who said they were committed to gender safety but as the women politicians interviewed reiterated, the platform had failed to protect them from harassment.

### *Twitter users in India*

Independent research commissioned by Twitter (India Today, 2021) shows that women in India mostly use the platform primarily for entertainment and current affairs (20.8%). Only 8.7% of the conversations focused on social change. In India, social media users are most likely to be urban dwellers who share Western values (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2014) and higher caste too (Mandal, 2020). Access to education and technology and therefore social media is negotiated by economic class, and the presence of women online is often viewed as a threat to misogynistic notions of masculinity (Halder and Jaishankar, 2016). Studies on the #MeTooIndia movement (Pain, 2021) have shown that while burgeoning Internet availability has certainly encouraged more women to participate online, underprivileged women are often not part of such movements and must negotiate their voice with economically stronger classes (Sircar, 2018). For example, the #PinjraTod (Break the Cage), a collective of women students and alumni of colleges from across the country, was criticized for being an elitist movement that failed to consider the experiences of women from marginalized communities (LiveWire Staff, 2019).

Among the estimated 22.1 million active Twitter users, in India, three-fourths are male. This complicates the hashtag activism scenario in the country where such advocacy is dependent on the work of elite participants that often drown out suburban voices but also need the informational and emotional labor of many which often remains unacknowledged

and uncelebrated (Pain, 2021). Thus, the central question guiding this analysis on the #TarunTejpal case focusses on the essence of conversations on social media and their deliberative character through the lens of the deliberative democratic theory and add to our understanding of hashtag feminism on social media in India.

### *Deliberative democracy*

Habermas (1988) conceptualized deliberation as an exchange of arguments characterized by rational and critical approaches among groups connected by common issues. Essentially a political approach, deliberative democracy as a theory postulates the importance of deliberation to encourage truthful and balanced discourse that promotes proactive and constructive discussion aimed at moving toward solutions (Gastil, 2008). Deliberation is a definitionally complex concept since it is not always a formal carefully designed product (Scudder et al., 2021). It has previously been distinguished into formal and informal forms (Eveland et al., 2011; Wyatt et al., 2000) where attention has been placed on the importance of the individual as an informal communicator whose sociable conversation is an important indicator of participation. Thus, theorists agree that deliberation includes different forms of “public talking” (Jacobs et al., 2009: 4) that essentially contribute to public opinion, and increasingly, scholars have turned to social media as a form of this public talking (Oz et al., 2018).

Democracy advances when citizens can engage in ways that encourage civic participation (Dahlgren, 2006) but to make that engagement truly deliberative requires engagement with different viewpoints that help conversations go beyond stereotypes and bring in different values and facets that encourage positive action to resolve contentions and address difficult questions (Oz et al., 2018; Rishel, 2011; Stroud et al., 2015). Thus, incivility and disrespect or other violent, insulting, racist or misogynistic exchanges violate the measures of deliberative discourse. To sum up, the key component of deliberative conversations as elucidated by Halpern and Gibbs (2013), Stroud et al. (2015), and Oz et al. (2018) focus on a common issue where communication is marked by reason and logic, rather than control and dominance, where participants identify solutions to issues by openness and respectful acceptance of different viewpoints and exchanges marked by empathy and civility.

But as Ryfe (2005) accentuates, deliberation can encourage actively participating citizens to produce sophisticated thinking, but this is rare and hard to accomplish. Mendonça et al. (2022) have argued the importance of going beyond verbal forms of communication and underlines the importance of acknowledging the relevance of non-verbal communication in human arguments especially when examining deliberation but the “visual, sonic and physical dimensions” (p. 35) of conversations do not lend themselves to critical measurement on social media. Besides, while users may actively use social media to exercise individual agency, imagined constraints of the social media platform by its users as constructed by individual responses to their sociocultural scenario also mediate use and expression on the platforms (Dixit, 2021).

In complex social setups like India, defined by a diversity of sociopolitical and economic divides, deliberative participation by all those affected would seem nearly impossible. A rigid adherence to aspects of deliberation, therefore, can often prevent

an appreciation of the different contexts audiences speak from and dilute the “the messiness of communication and communicative processes” that adds so much rich meaning to public understandings of issues (Dahlgren, 2006; 100). Thus, examining citizen discourse for attributes of deliberative discourse (Manosevitch and Walker, 2009; Papacharissi, 2004) can accommodate relevant and necessary social complexity into the theory. This is important in the realm of online conversations since computer-mediated communication (CMC), has been historically regarded as an impersonal and deindividualizing mode of communication, generally, encouraging stereotyping and inconsiderate talk which is less likely to lead to political action or consensus when compared with offline deliberation (Kiesler et al., 1984). Deliberative attributes as characterized by Papacharissi (2004), Stroud et al. (2015), and Oz et al. (2018) include logic, use of evidence, and rational arguments in conversation besides accountability, political engagement, and respect for individual autonomy. Impersonal as CMC can be, interactivity among users keeps authors and their messages together to create the social dynamics that govern the group (Rafaeli and Sudweeks, 1997).

Topics being discussed also set the tone for discussions. As Warren (2006) says, sensitive issues can often aggravate inequalities that can threaten deliberation. As a topic gender violence is polarizing and studies show that users who focus on victim blaming are often retweeted and have larger followers than Twitter users who tweet support for survivors (Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018). Small but engaged groups who post actively on the subject participate in discussion threads but rarely retweet information (Xue et al., 2019). But studies also testify to the effectiveness of deliberation around gender and sexual rights where government and women’s groups work together as “deliberative mini-publics” to advance participatory policymaking (Simon-Kumar, 2016).

In India, analyzing comments online after the 2012 Delhi rape and murder showed that there was little considered conversation and gendered notions of violence often perpetuated sexist norms where women were blamed with few objecting or questioning assumptions (Gurman et al., 2018). There was little “particularly poignant discussions about norms or personal/vicarious experience” (Gurman et al., 2018: 335) even though men and women both engaged with the topic. Few new insights on gender violence emerged and the focus on the brutality per se often hid the complex contexts in which women, especially young women, operated in India, like battling huge disparities in education and low workforce participation (John, 2020). This missing diversity is an important gauge of deliberative thought (Walsh, 2003) but as the #MeTooIndia, another high-profile expose on sexual exploitation of women in the country, showed, traditionally marginalized women like Dalits and trans folk found little support and toxic masculinity marred the sharing of personal narratives (Nanditha, 2021) which is also seen in traditional media. But Twitter hashtags create *affective publics*—publics that are mobilized and connected through expressions of sentiment (Papacharissi, 2016: 311). Therefore, nuanced study of different incidents that occur in “unpredictable, counter-intuitive, and non-linear ways” (Reese, 2016) helps understand the variations in public discussions and the sentiments that tie audiences together. Analyzing social media as platforms of communication and citizen engagement through the lens of deliberative democracy is not new but analyzing conversation on gender-based violence on social media based on this theory in a developing country like India is. This study examines

how social media and deliberative democracy operate on issues of gender violence (Rishel, 2011) and in the process, investigates the ontological and epistemological questions associated with deliberation and deliberative attributes of conversations surrounding violence against women and gender rights on social media in India and turns attention on the process rather than final outcomes.

It is in this light that this study examines:

*RQ1.* What are the defining themes and discourses of conversations on Twitter regarding the 2021 Tarun Tejpal case?

*RQ2.* What deliberative discourses emanate from these themes?

## Method

Tweets with the hashtag #Tarun, #TarunTejpal, and #Tehelka were collected using the Google Twitter archiver function from the announcement of the verdict when the hashtags trended on Twitter. Tweets from May to August 2021 were used for the analysis since that was when media coverage on the issue was at its peak. Tweets were posted after this timeline as well, but this study considers Twitter data from the time when media and public attention was at its highest on the issue. The tweets and tweeted responses with the hashtags were collected individually. The Google Twitter archiver downloaded 75,356 tweets. This data set had no pictures or photographs since the Archiver does not collect images. Three graduate research assistants (from a public university in India) and the author of the study read and reread the entire set three times to carefully remove redundancies and examine the conversation threads, especially responses to tweets and count tweets that were retweeted. For example, one tweet dated May 26, 2021, that said, "I keep losing track on who was on trial here. Every second paragraph begins with 'when prosecutrix was questioned'" had 230 responses and 30 retweets. This tweet was counted as a single tweet. The retweets were removed but each response was examined to answer the research questions. While conversations on Twitter are public, people tweeting or responding to tweets are not aware that their words may be collected for such analysis. To ethically protect users, each tweet was carefully anonymized. Some tweets were cited after all identifying material was removed. For example, the tweet mentioned above had the creator's name which indicates gender as well as a hashtag mentioning their city. The tweet was edited to remove these details. The curated data set of 40,000 Tweets was then textually analyzed, read, and reread for 'the long preliminary soak' (Hall, 1975: 15) by the entire team to generate the broader themes which were then checked and rechecked against the themes generated by the author and the research team.

Inspired by Pain and Chen (2019) where the authors manually textually analyzed 30,386 tweets by President Trump to understand the nature of his interactions with the US public in a bid to consider every nuance of the data set, this study avoids computational analysis and manually examined the entire corpus to ensure that each thread of conversation was considered in its entirety and context. India sees Twitter content produced in various languages as well as tweets that use a combination of languages. A tweet may have most of its content in English but may also use words in Hindi or Bengali

whose implications are important. For example, a tweet posted on June 2021 says, “It is always the woman. It’s always her fault#Akhirkyon#Akhirkabtak.” The two hashtags here are in the Hindi language and mean, “But why” and “For how long.” Software cannot detect words in different languages as well as different language fonts, which our multilingualism helped identify.

This is among the earliest empirical studies examining Twitter in India and gender violence after the seminal #MeTooIndia movement and therefore, I study the discourses in the Twitter conversations to understand the nature and attributes of deliberation and implied meanings (McTavish and Pirro, 1990). Thus, textual analysis that allows for the discernment of latent meaning and patterns as well as implicit patterns and inferences from text was considered most suitable (Fürsich, 2009). To answer RQ1 (defining themes and discourses) and RQ2 (deliberative discourses), textual analysis, which seeks to identify and reveal emergent themes (Guest et al., 2012), of the entire data set (40,000 tweets) was done, examining for content that shared experiences of misogyny and whether there was feminist support for the survivor among other subjects. What did the content creators have to say about the verdict? How feminist were their reflections on the legal system and rape survivors? When text is understood as a “complex set of discursive strategies that is situated in a special cultural context” (Fürsich, 2009: 240), then they can be investigated for what is said as well as its implications. This is especially pertinent to this study for gender and gender violence in India are extremely sensitive topics (Gurman et al., 2018). Quantitative approaches assist in attaching scores of sentiment and counting the numbers of responses and tweets, but this cannot help us identify issues of civility or analyze, in a nuanced fashion, the themes of discourses and characteristics of deliberation that this study focuses on (Karamshuk et al., 2017). Also, as Fürsich, (2009: 2) says, media content has a narrative nature and thus, its “potential as a site of ideological negotiation and its impact as mediated reality necessitates interpretation in its own right.” Coming right after the #MeTooIndia movement, years after the 2012 Delhi rape and murder case, the Tejpal verdict is considered a milestone and thus the interpretive nature of textual analysis that helps view communication as a holistic product of various influences as well as societal and power structures (Hawkins, 2017) is key. To ensure that deliberation (RQ2) was conscientiously investigated, I followed Stromer-Galley’s (2007) and Oz et al. (2018) operationalization and measures of the quality of deliberation in online groups. The data were examined for the use of logic and reasoning to justify claims as well as for civility and politeness with which responses were made and given to maintain coherence and participation (Oz et al., 2018; Stromer-Galley, 2007). Logic and reasoning as explicated by Stromer-Galley (2007) are characterized by specificity and valid use of facts. For example, a tweet “Courts are here to serve people irrespective of their status in life. Therefore, they must understand that only facts are to be considered” would be an example. Incivility, as operationalized by Papacharissi (2004), includes verbalized threats (“I will find and kill you”), stereotypes (“Women must be careful and do what is required of them”), and threats to individual rights and freedoms (“You are a woman. Know your place”). Yelling in online conversations are often characterized by capital letters so tweets were examined for all capital letters as well. The deliberative quality of comments was operationalized as Papacharissi (2004) and Stroud et al. (2015) have exemplified. Tweets and responses were investigated for supportive



statements (“Women’s rights are human rights”), links to credible sources of information (“Please consider what the constitution of the country says”), comprehensive argument (“Tarun Tejpal faces egregious allegations of rape. Tejpal’s reputation is well known in the journalist community. The charges have nothing to do with his alleged political persecution. Whataboutery doesn’t make him a saint irrespective of which college he went to & with whom!”), respect (“I see your point but maybe there is another way to think about this?”), and stating of facts (“Rape is a human rights issue.”). Credible sources of information are associated with credible institutions, organizations, or entities are free of errors and bias. Mainstream media considered credible here are organizations with a reputation for rigorous reporting and fact checking. In India news media like *The Hindu*, *The Hindustan Times*, and *The Indian Express* are considered examples of credible media (Bhuvanewari and Sudha, 2016).

Adopting the notion that longer messages are used for more complex ideas that Halpern and Gibbs (2013) employed in their examination of deliberation in social media, this study also analyses for the completeness of sentences while examining the ideas contained in them. Percentage figures have been used to indicate the number of tweets that pertain to certain themes. For example, at least 60% of the tweets (calculated on the entire corpus) focused on this issue at length since the verdict had specifically focused on this stating that “conduct not natural of rape victim” (Pg 233 -Verdict).

## Findings

This analysis of the corpus of tweets, from May to August 2021, shows that conversations surrounding the controversial Tarun Tejpal ruling on Twitter produced a rich variety of communication exchanges on certain common themes (RQ1) that had attributes of deliberative discourses (RQ2). The results are presented under two categories: Analysis of themes and discourses (RQ1) and Deliberative Discourses (RQ2).

### *RQ1: what are the defining themes and discourses of conversations on Twitter regarding the 2021 Tarun Tejpal case?*

A common theme (RQ1) that held together conversations was the court’s view on what constitutes “correct victim behavior.” At least 60% of the tweets (calculated on the entire corpus) focused on this issue at length since the verdict had specifically focused on this stating that “conduct not natural of rape victim” (Pg 233 -Verdict). In keeping with the literature on gender violence and its discussion on Twitter, tweets and retweets were also measured. These data show that tweets encouraged conversations, but there was little retweeting of tweets. Tweets from media organizations were retweeted especially if the reporting was respectful of the survivor but while conversation threads were active; “likes” were used to show appreciation and engagement rather than retweets. Audiences tweeted in different Indian languages like Hindi and Marathi, though they were few and often tweeted in response to other tweets. The word “survivor” was used in only 20% of the Tweets. Most used the word “victim,” even when they sympathized with her and emphasized the lack of women’s rights. The major themes underscored the pervasive violence that women are exposed to, the biased legal

system which still blames survivors, and acknowledgment of women whose voices may not be heard but whose experiences still mattered and the notion of extending feminist justice to women from all strata in the country. In the process, as the analysis to RQ2 showed, the tweets created networks between participants that also helped them address public understanding of the verdict and gender violence through coherent and logical communication exchanges. But few tweets linked to the #MeTooIndia movement or used hashtags linking to feminist organizations or other feminist hashtags. Trolling was minimal and not directed at individuals. The themes and discourses that emanated from the conversations are discussed below.

### *Analysis of themes and discourses (RQ1)*

*Emphasizing a culture of violence.* The judgment had underscored the accuser's behavior after the crime and most of the tweets focused on this. Tweets underlined the "Power politics of patriarchal verdict" and questioned the decision ("The #TarunTejpalCase judgment is scandalous and raises serious questions for this country"). They also laid bare the prevalent forms of violence that women are subject to and social attitudes toward survivors. (Rapists are re-assimilated into society much sooner than victims, who must face years of shame and character assassinations before they recover and heal, if at all.) Participants referred to the impact of the verdict on rape survivors in the country who wanted to register complaints for justice (Which woman will want to complain about sexual assault or rape ever again if this is how the complaint is treated and the judgment given?) While majority of the tweeted content was extremely sympathetic, the word "survivor" was used in only 20% of tweets. Instead, even while lauding the bravery of the survivor, she was referred to as a "victim" and this was ironic because participants dissected the language of the verdict and even stated ". . . the language and errors in the trial court's judgement in the #taruntejpalcase will have a chilling effect on women and may deter survivors from accessing legal services and courts in future."

*Forging connection through shared experiences.* Interactivity was high among participants. Much of the content started with the Tarun Tejpal case but focused on personal stories that spoke about the culture of gender violence that women in the country are subject to. Personal stories were exchanged, and help, both legal and psychological, was offered. Journalists, activists, and users from different walks of life shared advice and resources. This tweet, for example, "I appeal to u all to suggest ways where common women like us can awake the society and demand for severe punishment for the perverts. No long trials and no letting off d guilty on flimsy ground like #TarunTejpalCase" had 75 responses (Reading #TarunTejpalCase Order . . . Lessons so far: (1) Make a note of everything that happens, including calls, messages, conversations. If your memory gets it wrong, it can go against you in a rape complaint. (2) If you are feeling trauma, shock. Show it. Don't hide it). There was collective outrage against the trauma that women face and tweets like this, "How can we show trauma? All our lives we've been trained not to show any. We've been shut up, shoved, cornered when we talk about anything. That one predatory relative, the guy on the metro, the stalker classmate. We have shut down everything. Leave us alone"

captured the horror. Some of the tweets that garnered most interactivity also used sarcasm and dark humor like, “Dear #IndianWomen, if you’re sexually assaulted, go fly a kite. —Love, your judiciary.”

*Demands for a feminist legal system.* The word “misogynistic” was used often to describe the judgment. This tweet, for example, “Verdict in #TarunTejpalCase, is only the latest in a line of misogynistic judgements that comment on the behaviour of women” (retweeted 59 times and liked 20 times) had 25 responses that also discussed patterns of such judgments in various other cases in the country. The rights of women in cases of gender violence were strongly asserted, as this tweet shows, “The criminal justice system must observe the basics of a proper investigation, judicial fairness, and the survivor’s rights.” An important component of the verdict was the judges’ comments on the victim’s behavior (“non-rape victim like behaviour”) and this was discussed as a “horrendous lacunae in ‘Special Judge’ Kshama Joshi’s ‘verdict.’” As one Tweet asked, “Will the law not protect survivors who don’t weep?” Tweets pointed this out (In Tarun Tejpal acquittal, judge questions “appropriate” behaviour for rape victims) and demanded a more feminist and just judicial system emphasizing that, “This ruling comes at a time when women in India still face significant barriers to obtaining justice for sexual violence, especially when the alleged perpetrators are powerful.” Participants were clear that “A woman should not expect justice in this great nation of ours. . . Don’t want to believe above statement but #TarunTejpal judgement proves it.” The accuser’s name was mentioned in the verdict against her wishes and tweets in support said that “. . . directed the sessions court which acquitted #TarunTejpal of rape, to redact information about the victim’s identity from its judgement before uploading it on the court’s website.” As participants tweeted, “Seems like it wasn’t Tarun Tejpal who was standing trial but the woman.” Comments on the legal system showed how precarious reporting rape can be. For example, this tweet stated, “Reports of botched up investigation in #TarunTejpalCase shows the immense power the junior cop at your local thana has. He will fail to produce crucial evidence in court hearing and accused will be acquitted over technicalities. By this time, the case has faded from public memory,” summed up the experiences of the women reporting assault and garnered much support.

*Acknowledging “unheard voices.”* There was open acceptance that the law in India is biased (“Women do not matter”) but tweets also mentioned that not all women’s experiences even find mention (“My assault I can talk about but is every woman’s voice heard?”). Supportive tweets were deeply intersectional (“Imagine is this was a poor woman with no resources?”) and users acknowledged that a biased legal system affected the poor and marginalized women the most. As one tweet said, “Legal attitudes to women without power is even worse.” Tweets acknowledged that women without resources (whose voices remained muted) needed help. One tweet sequence explained the whole process of reporting a crime and the rights of people in Hindi in a bid to reach people who may not know English. Most of the tweets were in English but tweets in different local languages were also present. Tweets acknowledged the complexity of India’s social set up acknowledging how caste and economic situations may add complexity to legalities and reporting of crimes in the country. Users acknowledged that a truly feminist system would only be possible when women from all strata had a space where their needs were acknowledged.

## *RQ2: what deliberative discourses emanate from these themes?*

RQ2 focuses on the deliberative discourses that emerged from these themes. The tweets and conversations that followed were marked by civil, logical, and reasonable exchanges and thus they exhibited the attributes of deliberation as exemplified by Papacharissi (2004), Stroud et al. (2015), and Oz et al. (2018). Most conversations constituted full sentences and correct grammar (Halpern and Gibbs, 2013) and tweets used full sentences with no abbreviations to put forth complex ideas (“Rape is more than just sexual abuse. Its effects on the psyche can be enormous.”). Gender and associated rights are often contentious topics, but the tweets and retweets showed remarkable restraint. Among the earliest tweet threads that garnered many responses was, for example, “A thread that really does what it should do . . . thread all the unruly strands together. Please read. A detailed and thorough analysis of #TarunTejpalCase.” This thread had about 760 responses, 250 likes, and 57 retweets. It collected all media articles and interviews from credible mainstream media and collated material that would help audiences understand the timeline and details of the case. Readers praised this as “. . . completely cut out the noise and carefully summarized the issues.” Twitter audiences responded to the threads and even when contentious details were discussed there was no incivility or trolling. For example, the verdict clearly blamed the survivor for missing evidence and that was protested emphatically (“She wrote picked up her underwear in first email but pulled her underwear in statement to police & magistrate and that’s a ‘material contradiction’ that can’t be made by an ‘educated journalist’ & hence NO RAPE ‘Banging my head on wall’”). There was deep sympathy for the survivor and a genuine desire to understand the verdict in its entirety (“Just curious, why would they give his phone to her? What did that imply”).

Men and women were part of this exchange as evidenced by their profile pictures and use of pronouns. Other genders were not immediately obvious. Questions were asked and responded to by both genders. For example, one question, “Just curious, why would they give his phone to her?” was responded to by a female journalist who explained, “As evidence. His sexual history and private messages could have been used to prove his proclivities as well.” The discussion then proceeded to examine how “The #Tejpalcase trial overlooked the fundamental privacy rights of the victim to uphold the rights of the accused.” As some tweets showed responders were willing to be corrected in their analysis. As one tweet shared, “My doubt is whether the defence can legally access phone records to strengthen its case. I am 100% sure it can. Happy to be corrected.” Responses were sometimes sarcastic (“oh, to qualify as a rape-victim make sure you’re depressed and not cheerful. Follow the guidelines of the court”) but never disrespectful of the subject and issue. Gender and professional diversity were present. Men and women from different professions participated, sharing links to media articles, and explaining issues but beyond this there was little evidence that rural voices and women from other walks of life also engaged in this. No incivility was detected even when outrage was expressed (aham! aham! women get in line to learn how a #RAPESURVIVOR must act to be seen as one. The judges have lessons for all the women). There was no denigrating or abuse of the participants. There was disagreement but this was done with respect (“It’s not always that I agree with Rohini. But she is spot on here. There are a lot of false cases of

such nature, but this is definitely not one of them.”). Despite the logic and reason contained in the conversations, few solutions for a more just system emerged from the critical perspectives on the verdict.

*Limited amount of trolling.* While conversations, overall, were deliberative and considered, some amount of trolling was present, where the word “feminist” was viewed as problematic. This tweet (“I feel so sorry for this man #TarunTejpal. He is a real victim of fake rape charges; a victim of gender-based legal system which presumes every male guilty and every women victim.”) captured the essence of the exchanges directed at participants protesting the issue. These tweets were stand-alone content and not part of conversation threads. Accounts with female names and profile pictures tweeted in support of Tejpal (“Feminist drama over #TarunTejpal acquittal say all. In India men are not entitled to acquittal even when they are innocent”) often tweeting memes to emphasize their points. A Twitter handle @MensDayOutIndia (requesting readers to “check out the Other Side”) tweeted support for Tejpal through hashtags like #MenToo #SpeakUpMen #GenderBiasedLaws #TarunTejpal #TarunTejpalCase and to protest “Feminists want all men to be convicted even the innocent ones.!” Women organizations were called out for “. . . deliberately provoking ignorant people by wrongly calling that good judgement a bad one.”

In these tweets, there was little consideration of the verdict which has been described as a “rape manual” by the Bombay High Court. As one tweet said, “. . . But one part of a wing who always get offended and can’t digest if a Man gets acquitted when a woman file allegation against him.” Much of the trolling was exemplified by sweeping generalization like, “I say that #TarunTejpal is innocent and feminist organizations must stop their drama. Whole India stands with #TarunTejpal.” Addressing the young survivor as a “survivor” drew vitriol (Survivor??? Her allegations have been found to be false and malicious.; Every female who calls the accuser of #TarunTejpal as survivor or victim is siding against law and against men.). The study does not examine whether these accounts are real or fake ones, and this is an acknowledged weakness.

## Discussion

The #MeTooIndia experience may have highlighted certain crucial negatives of how the social media space and hashtag feminism operates in a country with divides as stark as India, but as the recent high-profile verdict in the journalist Tarun Tejpal rape case shows, Twitter in India exhibits characteristics of maturity as a space of deliberation and debate where the angry trolling that marked the #MeTooIndia movement was mostly replaced by calm reasoned debate around the controversial ruling and the rights of women. This study centered on the themes and deliberative attributes of the discourses that emerged from the analysis of 40,000 tweets with the hashtags #TarunTejpalCase #TarunTejpal#Tehelka that emerged after the verdict in May 2021, when Tejpal was absolved of raping his young colleague. Using social media to document and process the rape culture that women internationally face is globally becoming a norm (Mendes et al., 2019) and examples like the #WomenofShaheenBagh protests and #LahukaLagaan that changed taxation laws on sanitary napkins (Fadnis, 2018) have shown how women can use social media to effect social change but few studies have examined the essence of such online conversations in

India, especially through the lens of deliberative democracy. In a bid to investigate the ontological and epistemological questions related to the attention and debate surrounding gender violence and feminist justice, the study turns attention to the process of deliberation and its attributes rather than just outcomes (Rishel, 2011). Deliberation is complex since it does not follow designed paths (Scudder et al., 2021). Its formal and informal forms (Eveland et al., 2011; Wyatt et al., 2000) are both valuable, and this study specifically focuses on individual communication and considers that as important forms of participation. Besides addressing the need for more studies on social media activism on gender-based violence in India (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2014; Pain, 2021), this “watershed moment” (Unnithan and Kiran, 2021) provided an important opportunity to study the “unpredictable, counter-intuitive, and non-linear ways” (Reese, 2016) that changes are occurring in the way social media spaces create opportunities for dialogue, interaction, and participation. As we see, certain important attributes have emerged that attest to the growth and sophistication of the Twitter space in India as a site to understand and protest judicial systems that are extremely patriarchal in outlook and raise a voice against gender violence. Conversations showed clear deliberative attributes and showed that Twitter in India has strong potential to emerge as a space for deliberative feminist activism.

The defining themes and discourses (RQ1) asserted a culture of violence where such verdicts, focusing on survivor blaming, may deter others from registering violence in a country where media and social norms already revictimize people through biased reporting and patriarchal expectations (Drèze and Sen, 2013; Fadnis, 2018). While the language of the verdict was criticized, ironically, the word “victim” was used in more instances by participants rather than the rights-based term “survivor.” The victim blaming that characterizes much of rape reporting in the country (Easteal et al., 2015) was addressed but not adequately. The judge’s consideration of the survivor’s behavior was questioned but the language used underlined that even when audiences speak up for those who report such crimes, gaps in understanding and education crucially remain.

Connections were forged between journalists and citizens from different professions (Poell and Rajagopalan, 2015) leading to discussions on issues of trauma and publicizing gender-based sexual assault as human rights abuse (Losh, 2014: 1) and addressing difficult questions around sexual assault (Rishel, 2011). Helpful resources were shared as were deeply personal stories highlighting that despite such platforms and connections certain voices remain marginalized. Unlike conversations after the 2012 Delhi rape and murder that showed little depth in the quality and content in the debates, discussions here were unafraid to bring up issues of marginalization, the impact of this patriarchal verdict, and underscored issues related to the rehabilitation of survivors (Gurman et al., 2018). For example, the word “misogynistic” was used to describe the verdict as well as show a series of prior judgments that were also anti-women in nature. The “digitized narratives” (Keller and Ringrose, 2019) that were produced helped create feminist discourse pertaining to survivor rights, raising questions about legal systems and the rehabilitation of survivors.

Conversations, using clear complete sentences (Halpern and Gibbs, 2013), drew attention to crucial pieces of the democratic machinery in the country by focusing on gender disparities in legal cases. Thus, Twitter here emerged as more than just a site to express outrage. The discussions, by men and women, around the nature and impact of the ruling

saw participants engage in deeply intersectional considerations of how access to resources and education mediate gender violence and its reporting. While few new insights into gender violence may have been produced, the condition of powerlessness that women and especially the rural poor women face was crucially highlighted through a focus on how poverty and lack of education can create complex contexts (John, 2020). Tweets with dark humor like, for example, “Dear #IndianWomen, if you’re sexually assaulted, go fly a kite.—Love, your judiciary” got traction and were retweeted by others.

Conversations were characterized by elements of deliberation (RQ2) like civility, reason, logic, and balance (Gastil, 2008). The civility of the conversations encouraged further participation and, as certain Twitter threads show, different people contributed to “public talking” (Jacobs et al., 2009: 4) that helped mold public understanding of the case and verdict. Logic and evidence were used substantially to advance judicious ideas (Oz et al., 2018; Papacharissi, 2004; Stroud et al., 2015). For example, the thread “A thread that really does what it should do . . . thread all the unruly strands together. Please read” collated the media articles and interviews from credible media to assist readers to understand the nuanced details of the case. Readers praised this as “. . . completely cut out the noise and carefully summarized the issues.” Conversations centered around this thread with retweets and responses that encouraged participation. People asked questions about survivor rights and how the verdict had failed in protecting the rights of women, as well as how evidence for the case had been botched up during the investigation. Questions were asked in a civil tone and responded to with courtesy. Respect, so crucial for greater inclusivity was central and participants were “. . . Happy to be corrected” as they shared different observations. This engagement made it possible to go beyond the usual patriarchal arguments and combat gender stereotypes (Rishel, 2011).

Trolling was minimally present. The word “feminist” was viewed as problematic (“I feel so sorry for this man #TarunTejpal. He is a real victim of fake rape charges; a victim of gender-based legal system which presumes every male guilty and every women victim.”). But the usual angry harassment that marred the #MeTooIndia and general online presence for women (Amnesty International India, 2020) was absent here.

Studies have shown content blaming the victim are often retweeted and have larger followers than Twitter users who tweet support for survivors (Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018) but conversations here with the most responses were those supportive of the survivor. The threads were emerging from small groups actively posting on the subject but in keeping with prior studies there was little retweeting of information but more considered engagement (Xue et al., 2019). Tweets rarely tagged other social media movements or feminist hashtags or organizations even though feminist tweets like the #MeTooIndia, #DomesticViolence, and #ViolenceAgainstWomen during March–August 2020 significantly emphasized gender-based violence (Dehingia and Raj, 2020) in recent times.

Few of the conversation threads analyzed had uncivil discourse to impair the reflections. Warren (2006) has warned that topics being discussed set the tone of communication and that sensitive issues can often provoke disparities that can threaten deliberation. Conversations centered around specific topics from the controversial verdict (“She wrote picked up her underwear in first email but pulled her underwear in statement to police & magistrate and that’s a ‘material contradiction’”) that could have led to problematic reactions since gender is such a contentious topic in India (Gurman

et al., 2018), contributed, instead, to astute examinations of how the evidence in the case was viewed. Ryfe (2005) has asserted that deliberative democracy in public conversations can be hard to achieve and India's sociopolitical diversity may make it seem impossible but as the Twitter dialogue here exhibited, even in a scenario marked by impersonal computer-mediated communication (Rafaeli and Sudweeks, 1997), conversations can be civil, feminist, and intersectional. Communication exchanges surrounding the Tarun Tejpal verdict showed important characteristics of deliberative and democratic discourse (Halpern and Gibbs, 2013; Stromer-Galley, 2007) focusing on common topics (the verdict, gender violence, and women's rights) with discussions held together and expanded on with logic and reason, where few participants dominated, with observations marked by civility and consideration. But the small and engaged groups who post actively on such topics (Xue et al., 2019) and work together as 'deliberative mini-publics' to advance participatory policymaking around gender and sexual rights (Simon-Kumar, 2016) was missing. Participants shared views but they remained disparate and did not move toward finding concrete legal solutions. Twitter content criticized the verdict but offered few solutions to ensuring a more equitable judicial system thus highlighting the importance of the processes that lead to better understanding of the verdict and the legal situation rather than finding solutions per se (Rishel, 2011). Habermas (1988) conceptualized deliberation as arguments characterized by truthful and balanced discourse that works to promote proactive and constructive discussion that ultimately finds concrete solutions (Gastil, 2008) but discussions here fell short. Men and women both participated, some tweeting in different local languages (Mandavia and Krishnan, 2019), sharing conversations and exchanging ideas but the voice and participation of rural and traditionally marginalized women (though acknowledged) was still missing from the conversation and thus they were not as diverse. Diversity is an important measure of deliberative thought encouraging deeper examinations of issues (Walsh, 2003) and just like the #MeTooIndia, rural and urban women with no access to technology and education remained on the sidelines (Nanditha, 2021). Eschewing an inflexible adherence to deliberative facets, that can often prevent an appreciation of the different contexts audiences participate from and can diminish the 'the messiness of communication and communicative processes' that adds so much rich meaning to public understandings of issues (Dahlgren, 2006: 100), analyzing the corpus for deliberate attributes shows that while education and access to technology mediate presence on social media, women's participation clearly disregarded the idea that their presence might be viewed as a misogynistic threat and ensured, powerfully, that their voices found space (Halder and Jaishankar, 2016).

## Limitations and future research

While the study contributes to our understanding of Twitter as a space for deliberation in the international context, the study has several limitations. In line with Mendonça et al. (2022) who have emphasized the importance of going beyond verbal forms of communication to acknowledge the importance of non-verbal communication in human arguments especially when considering deliberation, this study does not consider the



“visual, sonic and physical dimensions” of the tweets. Nor does it study emotion which is an important aspect of human communication online. While users may actively use social media, what are some of the “imagined” constraints of social media that mediates expression on these platforms (Dixit, 2021)? Intersectionality is discussed but no solutions are offered as to how this can be strengthened. Williams et al. (2021) have underscored the essentiality of investigating how social media participants online “feel their own place in current events, developing news stories, and various forms of civic mobilization” but this study does not investigate this and, thus, I invite future researchers to fulfill these lacunae.

## Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The author received a grant from the Center for Advanced Media Studies at the Reynolds School of Journalism, University of Nevada, Reno.

## ORCID iD

Paromita Pain  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4787-6128>

## References

- Amnesty International India (2020) Troll patrol India: exposing online abuse faced by women politicians in India. Available at: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/press-releases/shocking-scale-of-abuse-on-twitter-against-women-politicians-in-india/> (accessed 12 October 2021).
- Belair-Gagnon V, Mishra S and Agur C (2014) Reconstructing the Indian public sphere: news-work and social media in the Delhi gang rape case. *Journalism* 15(8): 1059–1075.
- Bhuvaneswari V and Sudha G (2016) A study on customer satisfaction towards Hindu newspaper in Coimbatore city. *International Journal of Applied Research* 2(10): 404–407.
- Bohner G, Eyssel F, Pina A, et al. (2013) Rape myth acceptance: cognitive, affective and behavioural effects of beliefs that blame the victim and exonerate the perpetrator. In: Horvath MAH and Brown JM (eds) *Rape*. Cullompton: Willan, pp. 40–68.
- BusinessLine (2020) Twitter launches hashtags-activated special emoji. *@Businessline*, 6 March. Available at: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/info-tech/social-media/twitter-launches-hashtags-activated-special-emoji/article31002334.ece> (accessed 12 October 2021).
- Dahlgren P (2006) Civic participation and practices: beyond “deliberative democracy.” *Researching Media, Democracy and Participation* 23.
- Dehingia N and Raj A (2020) Mining Twitter data to identify topics of discussion by Indian feminist activists. Available at: [https://data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/UCSD-Brief-1\\_Big-Data-and-Gender-in-Covid-Brief-Series.pdf](https://data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/UCSD-Brief-1_Big-Data-and-Gender-in-Covid-Brief-Series.pdf)
- Dixit S (2021) I refused to say# MeToo: negotiating between individual agency and “imagined” platform constraints. *Journal of Creative Communications* 17: 35–48.
- Drèze J and Sen A (2013) *An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Eastel P, Holland K and Judd K (2015) Enduring themes and silences in media portrayals of violence against women. *Women’s Studies International Forum* 48: 103–113.
- Edwards E, Ford S, Gajjala R, et al. (2021) Shaheen Bagh: making sense of (re)emerging “Subaltern” feminist political subjectivities in hashtag publics through critical, feminist interventions. *New Media & Society*. Epub ahead of print 7 December. DOI: 10.1177/14614448211059121.

- Eveland WP Jr, Morey AC and Hutchens MJ (2011) Beyond deliberation: new directions for the study of informal political conversation from a communication perspective. *Journal of Communication* 61(6): 1082–1103.
- Fadnis D (2018) Uncovering rape culture: patriarchal values guide Indian media's rape-related reporting. *Journalism Studies* 19(12): 1750–1766.
- Fürsich E (2009) In defense of textual analysis: restoring a challenged method for journalism and media studies. *Journalism Studies* 10(2): 238–252.
- Gastil J (2008) *Political Communication and Deliberation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Goel V, Venkataraman A and Schultz K (2018) After a long wait, India's #MeToo movement suddenly takes off. *The New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/09/world/asia/india-sexual-harassment-me-too-bollywood.html> (accessed 15 April 2021).
- Guest G, MacQueen KM and Namey EE (2012) Introduction to applied thematic analysis. *Applied Thematic Analysis* 3(20): 1–21.
- Guha P (2021) *Hear#Metoo in India: News, Social Media, and Anti-Rape and Sexual Harassment Activism*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Gurman TA, Nichols C and Greenberg ES (2018) Potential for social media to challenge gender-based violence in India: a quantitative analysis of Twitter use. *Gender & Development* 26(2): 325–339.
- Habermas J (1988) *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (trans. SW Nichol森 and JA Stark). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Halder D and Jaishankar K (2016) *Cyber Crimes against Women in India*. New Delhi, India: SAGE Publications India.
- Hall S (1975) Introduction. In: Smith ACH, Immerzi E and Blackwell T (eds) *Paper voices: The popular press and social change 1935–1965*. London, England: Chatto and Windus.
- Halpern D and Gibbs J (2013) Social media as a catalyst for online deliberation? Exploring the affordances of Facebook and YouTube for political expression. *Computers in Human Behavior* 29(3): 1159–1168.
- Hawkins S (2017) *Settling the Pop Score: Pop Texts and Identity Politics*. Routledge.
- India Today (2021) From beauty to books and social change, what Indian women talk about most on Twitter. *India Today*, 5 March. Available at: <https://www.indiatoday.in/trending-news/story/from-beauty-to-books-and-social-change-what-indian-women-talk-about-most-on-twitter-1776073-2021-03-05> (accessed 12 October 2021).
- Jacobs LR, Cook FL and Carpini MXD (2009) *Talking Together*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- John ME (2020) Feminism, sexual violence and the times off# MeToo in India. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 26(2): 137–158.
- Karamshuk D, Shaw F, Brownlie J, and Sastry N (2017) Bridging big data and qualitative methods in the social sciences: A case study of Twitter responses to high profile deaths by suicide. *Online Social Networks and Media* 1: 33–43.
- Kiesler S, Siegel J and McGuire TW (1984) Social psychological aspects of computer-mediated communication. *American Psychologist* 39(10): 1123–1134.
- Kim SH, Han M, Choi DH, et al. (2012) Attribute agenda setting, priming and the media's influence on how to think about a controversial issue. *International Communication Gazette* 74(1): 43–59.
- LiveWire Staff (2019, March 23) Pinjra Tod responds to allegations of being non-inclusive. *Live Wire*. Available at: <https://livewire.thewire.in/gender-and-sexuality/pinjra-tod-responds-to-allegations-of-being-non-inclusive/> (accessed 18 October 2021).
- Losh E (2014) *The War on Learning: Gaining Ground in the Digital University*. MIT Press.

- Mandal D (2020, July 19) India's oppressed groups had high hopes from internet. But upper castes got in there too. *ThePrint*. Available at: <https://theprint.in/opinion/indias-oppressed-groups-had-high-hopes-from-internet-but-upper-castes-got-in-there-too/463431/> (accessed 30 October 2021).
- Mandavia M and Krishnan R (2019) "Non-english tweets are now 50% of the total": Twitter India MD. *The Economic Times*. Available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/tech/non-english-tweets-are-now-50-of-the-total-twitter-india-md/articleshow/72000048.cms?from=mdr> (accessed 12 October 2021).
- Manosevitch E and Walker D (2009, April) Reader comments to online opinion journalism: A space of public deliberation. In: *International Symposium on Online Journalism*, Vol. 10, April, pp. 1–30.
- Mendes K, Ringrose J, and Keller J (2019) *Digital Feminist Activism: Girls and Women Fight back against Rape Culture*. Oxford University Press.
- Mendes K, Keller J and Ringrose J (2019) Digitized narratives of sexual violence: making sexual violence felt and known through digital disclosures. *New Media & Society* 21(6): 1290–1310.
- Mendonça RF, Ercan SA and Asenbaum H (2022) More than words: a multidimensional approach to deliberative democracy. *Political Studies* 70: 153–172.
- McTavish DG and Pirro EB (1990) Contextual content analysis. *Quality and Quantity* 24(3): 245–265.
- Nanditha N (2021) Exclusion in# MeToo India: rethinking inclusivity and intersectionality in Indian digital feminist movements. *Feminist Media Studies*. Epub ahead of print 13 April. DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2021.1913432.
- Oz M, Zheng P and Chen GM (2018) Twitter versus Facebook: comparing incivility, impoliteness, and deliberative attributes. *New Media & Society* 20: 3400–3419.
- Pain P (2021) "It took me quite a long time to develop a voice": examining feminist digital activism in the Indian# MeToo movement. *New Media & Society* 23(11): 3139–3155.
- Pain P and Chen GM (2019) The president is in: public opinion and the presidential use of Twitter. *Social Media + Society* 5(2): 2056305119855143.
- Pandey G (2021) In Tarun Tejpal acquittal, judge questions "appropriate" behaviour for rape victims. *BBC News*, 28 May. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-57266447> (accessed 12 October 2021).
- Papacharissi Z (2004) Democracy online: Civility, politeness, and the democratic potential of online political discussion groups. *New Media & Society* 6(2): 259–283.
- Papacharissi Z (2016) Affective publics and structures of storytelling: Sentiment, events and medi-ality. *Information, Communication & Society* 19(3): 307–324.
- Poell T and Rajagopalan S (2015) Connecting activists and journalists: Twitter communication in the aftermath of the 2012 Delhi rape. *Journalism Studies* 16(5): 719–733.
- Rafaelli S and Sudweeks F (1997) Networked interactivity. *Journal of Computer-mediated Communication* 2(4): JCMC243.
- Reese SD (2016) Communication and the public: the challenge of investigating global media spaces. *Communication and the Public* 1(2): 137–142.
- Rishel NM (2011) Digitizing deliberation: normative concerns for the use of social media in deliberative democracy. *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 33(3): 411–432.
- Ryfe DM (2005) Does deliberative democracy work? *Annual Review of Political Science* 8: 49–71.
- Scudder MF, Ercan SA and McCallum K (2021) Institutional listening in deliberative democracy: towards a deliberative logic of transmission. *Politics*. Epub ahead of print 29 December. DOI: 10.1177/026339572111060691.

- Shetye M (2021) 7 years on, court acquits Tarun Tejpal of rape charge. *The Times of India*. Available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/7-years-on-court-acquits-tarun-tejpal-of-rape-charge/articleshow/82843681.cms?fmapp=yes&from=mdr> (accessed 30 January 2022).
- Simon-Kumar R (2016) The paradoxes of deliberation: “Te Ohaakii a Hine—National Network Ending Sexual Violence Together (TOAH-NNEST)” and the Taskforce for Action on Sexual Violence (2007–2009). *Political Science* 68(1): 36–54.
- Sircar O (2018) Doing and undoing feminism: a jurisdictional journey. In: *Men and Feminism in India*. RoutledgeIndia, pp. 73–99.
- Stromer-Galley J (2007) Measuring deliberation’s content: a coding scheme. *Journal of Public Deliberation* 3(1).
- Stroud NJ, Scacco JM and Muddiman A (2015) Changing deliberative norms on news organizations’ Facebook sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 20: 188–203.
- Stubbs-Richardson M, Rader NE and Cosby AG (2018) Tweeting rape culture: examining portrayals of victim blaming in discussions of sexual assault cases on Twitter. *Feminism & Psychology* 28(1): 90–108.
- Unnithan S and Kiran T (2021) Tarun Tejpal case: the trial isn’t over. *India Today*, 5 June. Available at: <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/special-report/story/20210614-tarun-tejpal-case-the-trial-isn-t-over-1810619-2021-06-05> (accessed 4 October 2021).
- Walsh KC (2003) The democratic potential of civic dialogue on race. In: *Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association*, April.
- Warren WH (2006) The dynamics of perception and action. *Psychological Review* 113(2): 358.
- Williams MG, Mukherjee I and Utsey C (2021) Mobility and affect in the# deleteuber mo (ve) ment. *Convergence* 27(1): 85–102.
- Wyatt RO, Katz E and Kim J (2000) Bridging the spheres: political and personal conversation in public and private spaces. *Journal of Communication* 50(1): 71–92.
- Xue J, Macropol K, Jia Y, et al. (2019) Harnessing big data for social justice: an exploration of violence against women-related conversations on Twitter. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies* 1(3): 269–279.

### Author biography

Dr. Paromita Pain is an assistant professor of Media Studies at the Reynolds School of Journalism, University of Nevada, Reno.