

**Social Media Call-Outs: A New Wave or Institutional
Abrogation**

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Abstract: Public call outs have exponentially grown as a form of seeking justice over the internet; however, the rather simplistic process has many tenets on both sides that are often left undiscussed. The rather descriptive idea has many layers to it which are now getting questioned with the increase in number of social incidents. Many movements have achieved a new identity because of the much larger platform that social media instruments provide, correspondingly the identity of an individual on their social handles has also acquired a status of abject importance. Nevertheless, the world of social media call outs may have originally been the supporting base for a new wave, the same feature has come dangerously close to abrogating institutional forms of justice and overriding the idea of due process. The aim of the paper is to analyze and provide a more concrete idea of social media call outs, while analyzing both, the good and ineffectual aspects of the debate surrounding the vexed issue.

INTRODUCTION

The social identity of a 21st-century-being, today, forms a place of abject importance. The identity of humans as social animals, with the inclusion of newer e-mediums of communication, has taken a greater meaning. The incredibly popular platforms such as Facebook and Instagram provide a large space for its users to interact and form connections; the Nokian motto of ‘Connecting people’ holds a new denotation in 2020. Nonetheless, the growth of electronic mediums has also created space for a new wave of information generation and rights assertion. Numerous accounts on Instagram and pages on Facebook are dedicated to generating awareness about social human rights and sharing experiences of survivors/victims of abhorrent human actions.¹ The idea behind such forums, or even the multiple movements with social media projections, such as the #Metoo movement, is to create a much safer space not just on the platforms in question, but in the real world too.² The incidents shared through these pages, accounts etc., have in the recent years affected much in the outside world. The new power of social media has shifted the dynamics of information broadcasting, where an experience shared over these platforms will have a much larger audience as compared to their traditional print and media counterparts.

¹ Lisa Lukose & Alankrita Mathur, *Human Rights and Social Media* in Human Rights and Digital Age 31, 39 (March., 2019).

² BBC news, *what has me-too actually changed*, May 12, 2018, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-44045291> (Last Visited on May 23rd, 2020).

Accordingly, and to highlight the extremely popular line, *with great power comes great responsibility*, it is important that the incredible outreach and the possibility to do much good through these social mediums does not override the semblance of ‘due process’ of an incident.³ The current trend has become to accept whole heartedly, without questioning, any experience shared over these platforms; while this has allowed victims to much easily come out and share their stories, it has also created a situation of disregard for the accused’s version. Accordingly, the idea behind this piece is to analyze the growth of social media as a space for information generation, harping on the much good it has done while also probing the possibility of extreme repercussions from an unchecked trend of social media call outs.

THE EXPANSION OF PUBLIC CALL OUTS

Social media call outs are an expression of the social/communal form of justice. It exists in contravention with the archaic principles of the institutional process. The way in which an Instagram or twitter call out works is incredibly personal; the victim often shares his/her experiences on their handles which more than reverberates with their viewers and is shared further on.⁴ The personal expression of an event makes the account a lot more relative for the readers; the two-person coverage of an experience allows the reader to reflect on their own daily encounters and understand how they might too, unknowingly, have been victims of similar events. The neo-centric feature of any such basic expression of an incident, relegates a space to the victim to not only garner empathetic responses but also penalize the offender in the form of a social boycott, to say the least. The personalized form of awareness generation has spread across the globe in the shape of different movements.⁵ Social media as a platform to raise voices against exploiters, first exponentially grew in India and across the world with the #Metoo movement. The movement saw multiple actresses and actors in Hollywood call out various directors, producers and fellow thespians for their abhorrently exploitative acts. The movement truly brought to light how widespread the exploitation of many members, especially women, in any social institution exists. Alyssa Milano’s words beautifully, yet quite gravely capture the true extent of the issue, “If all women, who were victims of sexual exploitation were to change their status’ to #Metoo, we could get an idea of the magnitude of the problem.”⁶ The simple statement reverberated throughout the world and women across

³ The Guardian, *After #Metoo we can’t ditch due process*, January 8, 2018, available at

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/nov/01/call-out-culture-obama-social-media>(Last Visited on May 23rd, 2020).

⁵ Xinyuan Wang, *Social Media and Social Relationships* in *Social Media in Industrial China* 97, 126 (1st ed., 2016).

⁶ The Guardian, *Alyssa Milano on the #Metoo movement*, December 1st 2017, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/dec/01/alyssa-milano-mee-too-sexual-harassment-abuse>(Last Visited on May 23rd, 2020).

continents used the hashtag to call out their exploiters and share their experiences. India saw the impact of the large scale spread of the idea over the internet; the movement imbibed by many in the Indian film industry and by others, who formed a part of the professional working spaces beyond just Bollywood. The movement, largely centered on the various online platforms, allowed, for the lack of a better term, the cleansing of the professional environment which had made degenerate human actions and inactivity against women, no less than a staple practice. Another initiative started essentially by women and for women was the Time's up movement. Not unlike the #Metoo trend, Time's up was influenced by the global call for change and the Weinstein effect to create a forum for abused female farmworkers.⁷ A movement started by a simple letter of solidarity has brought changes at a level, comparable to the Bhandhua Mukhti Morcha epistolary decision.⁸ The Time's up fund currently forms a team of more than Eight Hundred volunteer lawyers and holds more than twenty million dollars in their legal fund, according to a Forbes magazine estimate. Accordingly, the change situated by the movements over these platforms is not just through such massive initiatives, the space created for informed debate allows information exposure at a much simpler level as well. An example of a small scale call-out or rather a type of social exposure is the recent 'Bois Locker room incident.' The locker room was a group of a few school going boys on the immensely popular social media site, Instagram.⁹ Some leaked screenshots of the conversations from the group showed the degeneracy of the incredibly young minds. The members of the group would regularly share pictures of girls amongst themselves and then pass comments, criticizing the girls' attires to even questioning their morality. A few comments went beyond the normalized idea of locker room talk to aspects which inhumanely objectified women. Boys less than eighteen years of age talked about girls as degenerates do; the worst part being that most of them came from well settled families and are students of numerous elite high schools in Delhi. The open exposure of these acts, created a huge outrage on social media, where many girls came out in support of each other and put up personal accounts, Instagram stories and Twitter posts to further push the move. The movement was then picked up by multiple news media channels who broadcasted debates on the issue; all in an attempt to relegate a better social space for women.¹⁰ The initiative taken up by a few brave college students, may not be as huge as the #Metoo trend or the Time's Up movement; nevertheless, the idea behind it is the same,

⁷ The Vox, *Time's Up: Hundreds of Hollywood actors are pledging to fight harassment*, January 2nd, 2018, available at <https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/1/2/16840882/times-up-harassment-hollywood-metoo>(Last Visited on May 23rd, 2020).

⁸ *Bandhua Mukhti Morcha v. Union of India and Others*, AIR 1984 SCR 802.

⁹ The Hindu, *Bois Locker room, a reflection of an existing mindset*, May 21st, 2020, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/bois-locker-room-a-reflectionof-an-existing-mindset/article31638044.ece>(Last Visited on May 23rd, 2020).

¹⁰*Id.*

to enforce upon a much safer social space, while rallying against the presence of judgmental tenets in any way or form be it in the real world or on its social media parallel.

These movements imbibe the idea of a free individual in society, one which is not discriminated against, is protected from harassment and has a say of their own in any issue of personal or public interest. The unmitigated and advanced growth of these initiatives has been propelled by the different social media mechanisms; none of these movements would have seen the level success it see's today, without utilizing the massive outreach of the various social media platforms.¹¹ Social media has truly created a new sphere of communal justice, one which is not bogged down by traditional aspects of ineffectiveness and inefficiency and allows anyone no matter what their background may be to share their experiences and seek justice.¹² The existence of these new media platforms has created a new sphere for grief redressal and unilaterally increased accountability for actions.

LACUNAS IN PRACTICE AND A NEW NEED

The call out culture is an expansive response against bigoted forms of expressions, largely over social platforms. However, many idiosyncrasies which form a part of the culture often go unnoticed and the issues which are deeply engraved with this practice hardly ever become the subject of informed debates. A particular version of the call out culture has existed for centuries and has been used by the marginalized as tools to express their concerns and fight against bigoted injustice; nevertheless, this practice of 'cancelling' the accused may not be as effective or even equitable as it seems.¹³

The true idea of a call out in the flesh, doesn't entirely cover what activism demands. The use of a hashtag to demonstrate against a problematic opinion or an action which does not subscribe to the progressive ideals of today's social existence, doesn't entirely solve the problem.¹⁴ For instance: you come across a violent and unethical statement over a particular issue by a public figure on twitter, the first thing you do is call out their regressive mindset and write your own thoughts on the issue and the statement. While it may now seem like you have done your bit, the ideas expressed by you are more likely to get lost in the crowd than to make the required noise. Accordingly, many a times what the call out culture does is that it makes the writer feel as if they have in fact created a difference and done their bit, whereas hardly any constructive change is actually brought about.¹⁵

¹¹Gregory P. Joseph, *Social Media: Social Media and Internet Evidence*, 41 *Litigation* 4 (2015).

¹² Peter John Chen, *Social Media in Australian Politics in a digital Age* 69,112 (4th ed., 2013).

¹³ Time, *Cancel Culture is not real at least not as in the way people think*, November 21st, 2019, available at <https://time.com/5735403/cancel-culture-is-not-real/>(Last Visited on May 23rd, 2020).

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ The Justice, *Cancel Culture: A truly toxic phenomenon in modern politics*, May 11th, 2019, available at <https://www.thejustice.org/article/2019/11/cancel-culture-a-truly-toxic-phenomenon-in-modern-politics>(Last Visited on May 23rd, 2020).

Now, this doesn't mean that you and I should stop calling out individuals when we see them conforming to reductionist ideas; however, we must take steps beyond it as well. If a particular issue irks us and requires public attention, it is our obligation to take our viewpoint further than a simple remark contradicting someone else's statements. The easier way is to share our opinions as much as possible and motivate likeminded individuals to present their views; while the difficult, more strenuous approach involves reaching out to the appropriate authorities and presenting the possible damage from the reductionist acts if steps to curtail them are not taken. The true idea of activism is to not just point out the problem, but rather to do everything in our power to restrict its spread and generate necessary awareness against it.

The most potent critique of the culture however, is not the lack of constructive change but rather the practice of a zealotry form of justice.¹⁶ Many critiques feel that the dogma currently imbibed by the social media activists is to present an issue, analyze it on their own and themselves pass judgement. The essence of the remark being that a few individuals themselves become the judge, jury and executioner. While this may be an exaggeration of the true extent of the issue, it is not completely baseless. An experience shared over social media, is many times accepted as the truth and the one and only account of the incident. The opposing views are not seen as another version but rather a counter to the true one. Not just that, often in many cases, the other side of events, from the accused's perspective are not even considered despite the fact that ideally, they should be given an equal amount of consideration. The complainant's words are taken as the gospel truth and any attempts made to refute them are seen as a part of a larger problem where the victim's voices are getting suppressed. The underlying issue ignored is that the unverified and unvetted account of events transcribes the accused of a particular incident to the victim of relentless social media attacks. The unresponsive presentation of accountability raises questions about the characters of those mentioned; which lacking substantive proof viably forms concerns of equitability. A very recent incident closely resembling such a fall out of events was the suicide of a Delhi boy called out for allegedly assaulting and molesting a girl. This particular incident had nothing to do with the 'bois locker room case,' however it mirrors the requisite pattern of social medial judgements.¹⁷ The boy had been accused by a girl through her Instagram post of physically assaulting her two years ago, an incident which she no longer wished to keep hidden. The boy upon getting pressurized took the extreme step and killed himself; his sister repeatedly maintains that he was not what the post accused him off and they could never now hear his side of the story. The

¹⁶The Wire, *Cancel Culture vs Rape Culture, and the case for repairing harm*, August 10th, 2019, available at <https://thewire.in/women/cancel-culture-vs-rape-culture-and-the-case-for-repairing-harm>(Last Visited on May 23rd, 2020).

¹⁷ The Wire, *Gurugram Teen Suicide Case: Parent seek probe against minor girl*, May 8th, 2020, available at <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/boys-locker-room-gurugram-teen-boy-suicide-parents-file-complaint-against-minor-girl>(Last Visited on May 23rd, 2020).

incident shows the wide scale impact a call out truly has and how important it is to form a better mode of redressal than the currently unchecked method. The complete termination of the call out practice would neither be equitable nor practically possible; however, a probable middle ground is the need of the time. The call out medium of expression has created a much wider space for victims to share their experiences and demand justice, nevertheless the very probable and severe possibility of the abuse of such a space should not be ignored. The communal change from social media platforms is a requisite form of development; nevertheless, a completely unregulated sphere may in the times to come create a more destructive space, where institutional forms of justice are overridden and the need for accountability for claims takes a back seat.