

Online misogyny on Twitter in India: Validating a taxonomy to measure its prevalence

Nabamallika Dehingia and Anita Raj

Center on Gender Equity and Health, University of California San Diego



INTRODUCTION

- Online misogyny is a violation of women's digital rights, and associated with adverse mental health outcomes for women
- Yet, there is no standard taxonomy to measure online misogyny
- We validate a theory-based taxonomy for online misogyny on Twitter in India, and test any change in its prevalence pre- and post the onset of the pandemic

METHODS

- Conducted robust qualitative coding of systematically selected subset of tweets
- Coding relied on a feminist theory-based definition of misogyny (40,672 tweets)
- Machine learning models used the coded subset of tweets to predict whether other tweets are misogynist (N=30 million tweets)

Sexual objectification

Sexist abusive content

Threaten to harm

Assert authority

Justify gender-based violence

Dismiss feminist efforts

Figure: A taxonomy for online misogyny on Twitter

CONCLUSION

- Like the offline world, digital platforms are home to increasing gender inequalities; online misogyny is prevalent and increasing on Indian Twitter (2% of daily tweets)
- Our study offers a valid taxonomy for online misogyny, that covers sexual objectification, abusive content, threats of harm, assertion of authority, justification of violence, and dismissal of feminism
- The 'backlash' effect that has been well documented for the offline feminist struggle can be observed on Twitter as well; dismissal of feminists and feminism is a significant part of the observed misogynistic content
- Findings emphasize that online misogyny is a continuum of violence experienced by women in the offline world
- Study also highlights utility of machine learning in examining aspects of violence against women

RESULTS

- Qualitative coding identified no tweets outside the scope of the six pre-defined types of online misogyny; high inter-rater kappa scores (>0.80)
- Sexual objectification, which includes sexual shaming, is the most common form of online misogyny (57%)
- Around 11% of misogynistic tweets justify violence against women or dismiss feminist efforts, with 13% of these tweets including the word 'feminazi'
- Around 2% of overall daily tweets on Indian Twitter are misogynistic, with a significant increase since the start of the pandemic, as indicated by Interrupted Time Series Analysis (ITSA)

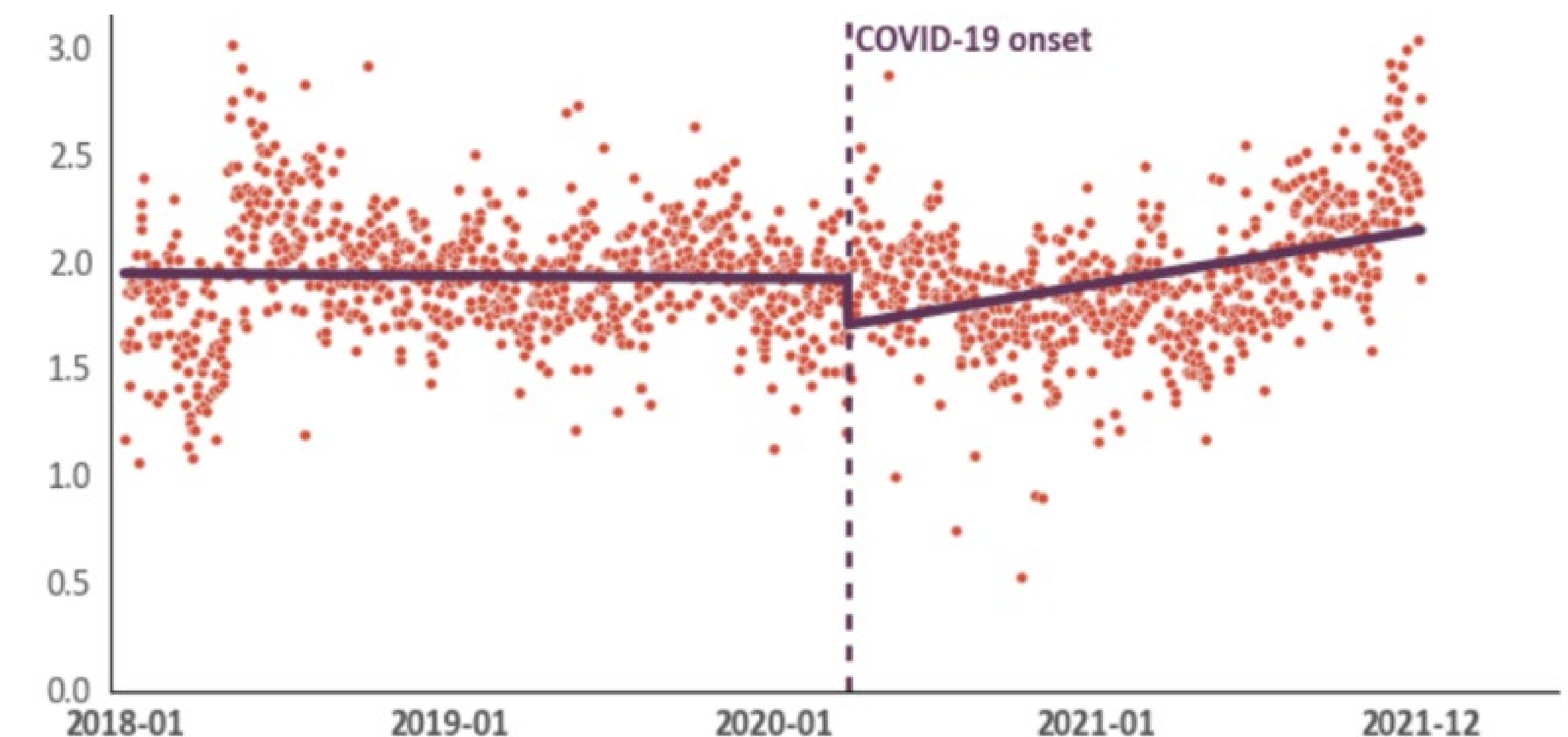


Figure: Percentage of daily misogynistic tweets from 2018 to 2021 (regression line from ITSA)