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## CYBER-ACTIVISM AND ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN HATHRAS RAPE CASE PROTEST

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### 1.0 Introduction

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has played a vital role in the emergence of the phenomenon, Cyber-activism. The advent of 2.0 Web technology has paved umpteen opportunities and unfathomable possibilities to connect and interact with one another than ever before. Availability of choices, ability to listen to number of voices, capability to interact through multimedia user generated contents, vast reachability, immediacy, hashtag and hypertext feasibilities are some of the advancements in communication science **Invalid source specified.** This technological advancement has given space and shown possible ways for the activists to make use of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to share one's opinion to the audience at large.

Social media has significance and resonance of its own. Shashi Tharoor, an eminent and prominent congress leader says, "Social media is a medium that allows big issues to be made out of issues that mainstream media ignores but politicians cannot" **Invalid source specified.** As of January 2018, there were approximately 250 million social media users who had been active at least once in a month **Invalid source specified.**

Twitter plays a vital role among all other social media in disseminating views through the means of hashtags, retweets and mentions. Twitter is a microblogging social network which allows the users to embed 280 characters and to embark in cyber space. If a user posts a tweet, it may, within short period of time, reaches to an average of 1000 individuals. Thus, tweets and retweets act as instant tools to impart and to impact the audience with in a fraction of seconds **Invalid source specified.** These days analysts observe the peak of tweets and full swing of cyber activism during the time of violence inflicted on women and Dalits in India.

### 1.1 Background of Hathras Gang Rape

A 19-year-old Dalit girl, from Valmiki community which is considered as lowest in the caste hierarchy, was brutally gang raped on 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2020 by four upper caste men in Hathras district of Uttar Pradesh. The terribly injured girl after struggling for almost two weeks at a hospital in Delhi died on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2020 **Invalid source specified.**

On 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2020, early in the morning around 2.30 the body of the victim was cremated by the U.P. Police without the presence or consent of her parents or relatives **Invalid source specified.** On the same day, reporters or other political leaders were barricaded and not allowed to visit the victim's house.

The alleged rapists were arrested and imprisoned for the charges of rape and murder. Since there were nation-wide outrage, the Uttar Pradesh government has suspended three cops and transferred the case to CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation).

### 1.2 Women and Rape Cases in India

According to National Crime Records Bureau, in 2019 an average of 87 rape cases per day were reported in India **Invalid source specified.** Last year in 2020, every day an average of 10 Dalit women were raped in India **Invalid source specified.** A survey states that only 5% to 31% of the rape victims report to the officials as rape survivors are blamed and stigmatised so often by the custodians of the society. There are numerous brutal cases happening every day against women in India. Women are kidnapped, molested, sexually harassed, raped and eventually murdered. A report states that, one third of women have undergone some form of sexual harassment in India. It is alarming to note that in the year 2018, there were 33,000 rape cases reported in India **Invalid source specified.** Laxmi KantaChawala, the former cabinet minister said that it was a matter of great shame that in India buffalos were sold for more than 30,000 rupees and women could be bought for just Rs.3000 **Invalid source specified.** Women become the easiest victims of gender bias, caste discrimination and economic deprivation. They also face multiple assaults like harassment, abduction, rape and murder.

### 1.3 Cyber-activism and the Role of Twitter against Rape Culture

On 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2012, a 23-year-old young woman, Nirbaya was gang raped in a running bus in Delhi who after two weeks died due to major injury **Invalid source specified.** This brutal and beastly assault on Nirbaya precipitated unprecedented worldwide protest and social agitation. This heinous and pervasive culture of harassment and inflicted violence against women have been challenged through continuous and constant discourses in social media.

Researches provide valid details of Twitter being used not only for creating public opinion on violence against women but also for harassing, bullying and shaming the rape survivors **Invalid source specified.** Victim blaming is another cultural element of male chauvinistic stereotyping behaviour which upholds the idea that women are raped based on their behaviour. Victim blaming goes



to the extent that the women are raped and victimised as moral and fair consequence and the perpetrators are not responsible for sexual assault or rape **Invalid source specified.** Due to the emergence of technology and social media, women rape victims are repeatedly harassed and continuously victimised through trolls and fabricated moral values. Thus, public shaming is another emerging trend and practice of uncivilised society against women.

Nevertheless, Social media enables likeminded people to come and converge in a virtual platform through multiple interactions and thus to achieve a collective consciousness on an issue. Twitter as a catalyst plays a major role in providing a platform for collective action **Invalid source specified.** As of July 2020, there are 17 million Twitter users in India **Invalid source specified.** Twitter-activists post their views on various issues especially of issues which the main stream media failed to highlight and broadcast. Number of assaults and atrocities committed against women, Dalit and the poor are brought out to the light by the social media platforms. Some of the most popular cyber-activism cases in India are Delhi Nirbhaya Gang Rape in 2012, KolkattaKamduni Gang Rape Case in 2013, Delhi Uber Cab Rape Case in 20014, Mumbai Shakti Mill Rape Case in 2013, Kathua gang rape case in 2018, Hyderabad Gang rape of a veterinary doctor in 2019 and Hathras gang rape case in 2020.

## 2.0 Review of Literature

Megan Stubbs-Richardson, Nicole E Rader and Arthur G Cosby (2018) in their qualitative analysis study the major themes related to rape culture. In their study they found out that Twitter users who engage in rape victim blaming are having more followers than Twitter users who tweet in support of rape victims. Amit Kumar (2014) in an exploratory study elaborates the role of social media in mass movement. His paper analyses the effectiveness of social media in mobilizing mass movements with reference to Nirbaya rape protest. Rishikesh Kumar Gautam &SonaleeNargunde (2014) elaborate the role of media in establishing justice. These scholars analyze the role of print, electronic and social media in the Delhi gang rape case and highlight that the media stimulate public opinion and change the attitude of the government towards the rape victims.

Tilly A. Gurman, Catherine Nichols & Elyssa S. Greenberg (2018) in their scientific paper quantitatively analyse the Twitter use in relation to gender-based violence. This study verifies the tweets related to 2012 Delhi rape case and researches the potential Twitter users based on gender. Tanushri Mukherjee (2016) conducted a study among the youth in Jaipur regarding the role of social media in showcasing atrocities against women. The objectives of her study are to understand the significance of social media in portraying various women issues and to develop an overview of the opinion of Jaipur youth in using social media for raising concern over women related atrocities.

Sonia Nuñez Puente (2011) presents an over view of the use of social media among Spanish women and their online campaigns against violence inflicted on women. The author briefs the upsurge of feminist organizations in the online platforms to articulate the violence against women and the women's use of information and communication technology for horizontal communication and democratic interaction. Saifuddin Ahmed and KokilJaidka (2013) analyses the role of Twitter in shaping the protest movement against Delhi gang rape case in 2012. Content analysis, social network analysis, frequency analysis and automated – manual content analysis through coding scheme had been used as methods to find out the key players, important themes and types of media resources in facilitating protest movement with reference to Delhi Nirbaya gang rape case.

## 2.1 Research Objectives

1. To examine the major themes on Hathras rape Protest in Twitter
2. To know the key players and formats in influencing Hathras rape protest movement
3. To understand the role of Twitter in facilitating protest with reference to Hathras

## 3.0 Research Methods and Materials

The main purpose of this paper is to analyse the content of Twitter in shaping and facilitating protest with reference to Hathras rape case. This research is a Qualitative study which implies Content analysis as a method to examine and validate the role of cyber-activism in influencing social movements with reference to Johnny Saldaña'scode scheme. The online behaviours and interactions of individuals through texts, images and videos in Twitter are collected and analyzed.

## 3.1 Coding Scheme

Twitter texts, hashtags and mentions are coded, categorized and finally formulated in to themes and theories based on Johnny Saldaña's Coding is done through manual and computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS).

**Table 1: Coding Scheme**

Tweets	Codes	Categories	Themes
The action of the state government has violated the regulations of the law and cremated the body of the girl without getting consent from the family members. This is an coward act of human right infringement. #HathrasRapeCase	Human Rights infringement. Cremated without the family.	Human Rights Violation	Human Rights

Manual Qualitative Content analysis of Hathras Rape Case related tweets between 29<sup>th</sup> September and 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020 were collected and codified according to the coding scheme of Johnny Saldana. For example,

### 3.2 Snowball Sampling

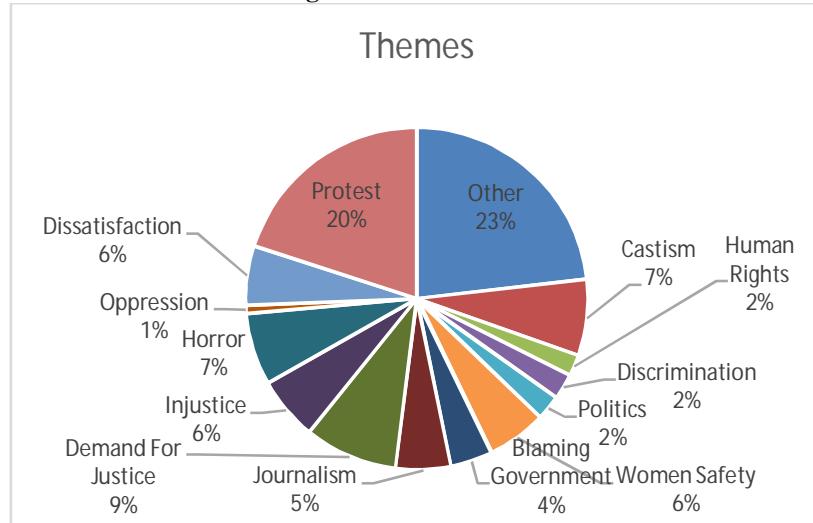
In the process of sampling, the references from the first group of samples would probably take the researcher to other samples. One tweet leading to the other and thus the sample grows like a rolling snowball. Through this style of networking, the researcher would be able to find people who are very active in disseminating contents in Twitter related to Hathras Rape Case.

### 3.3 Qualitative Content Analysis

#### 3.3.1 Identifying the Themes

A snowball sample of two hundred and fifty tweets (between 14th September and 14th October 2020) related to Hathras Rape Case were collected and manually codified, categorised and later themes have been elucidated. Figure 1 gives a brief understanding of themes which have been identified as prominent and protuberant for mobilising protest against Hathras Rape Case.

**Figure 1: Tweet Themes**

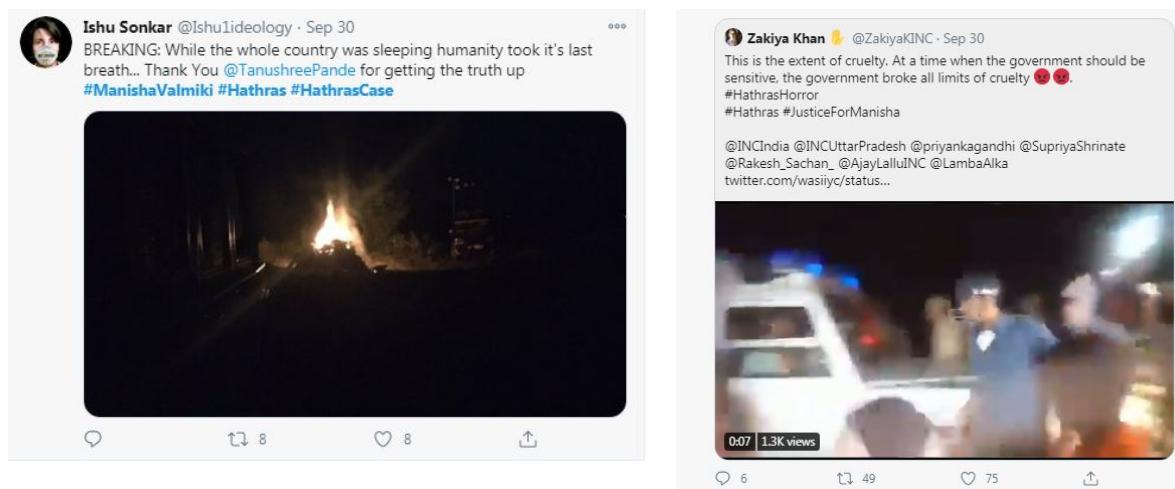


Tweets which describe assembling, mobilisation, rally, clashes, coordination of people etc were categorised as ‘protest’. For example, On October 7<sup>th</sup>, “Don’t miss this online public protest meeting today at 6pm IST - against the brutal #Hathras gang-rape of a Dalit woman and caste-based atrocities in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.”

Among a sample of collected tweets, twenty percent of them are having the elements and essentials of the theme, protest. Other tweet themes like Demand for Justice, Human Right Violation, Injustice, Caste Discrimination, Dissatisfaction, etc are few of the other themes which could motivate people for mobilisation and protest against gang rape in Hathras.

### 3.3.2 Identifying the Formats

A sample of hundreds of tweets which contain texts, images and videos have been identified and manually codified for better depiction of the nature and temperament of the situation. For example, after having shared the image of burning the corpse of the rape victim, IshuSonkar on 30<sup>th</sup> September writes in his Twitter handle, “While the whole country was sleeping humanity took its last breath... Thank You”. Meanwhile Zakiya Khan on 30<sup>th</sup> September shares a video which portrays the clash between the police and the protesters.



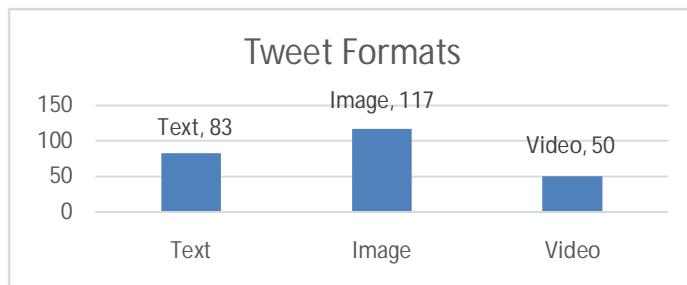
A total number of two hundred and fifty tweets were collected and manually analysed. Among those tweets few of them are associated with various images and video. These visual contents describe the elements of protest such as mobilisation, clash, rally, demonstration, candle light vigil and images which induce sense of sentiment and emotions etc.

**Table 2: Formats of Tweets**

S.No	Sources	Frequency
1.	Texts	83
2.	Images	117
3.	Videos	50

Table 2 enumerates the number of texts, images and videos which have been embedded or associated with the tweets related to Hathras Rape Case. Among two hundred and fifty samples, eighty-three tweets are just text messages, one hundred and seventeen tweets are circulated along with the relevant images and fifty tweets are videos with proper captions. As per the manual content analysis, twenty percent of these tweets embedded with images and videos are having the elements and essentials of protest like mobilisation, rally, public speech, clash, arrest, reportage, testimony, associational appeal for protest, demand for justice etc.

**Figure 2: Formats of Tweets**



### 3.3.3 Identifying the Prominent Hashtags

Hashtags prefixed with the sign ‘#’ is used to bring twitter sources together under an event or a context. This enables the users to tag their content and concept with the ‘Many’ across the globe who are interested in it. Thus, Twitter hashtag trending is a result of collective effort as the posts are wrapped into a single fold with the common hashtag **Invalid source specified.**

In this study around three hundred and thirty hashtags related to Hathras Rape Case are collected and codified both manually and through automated software. A manual content analysis of the hashtags shows that few of the hashtags related to Hathras Rape Case are frequent, consistent, specific and stable over a period of time. For example, #Hathras, #HathrasCase.

**Figure 3: Hashtags Analysis**

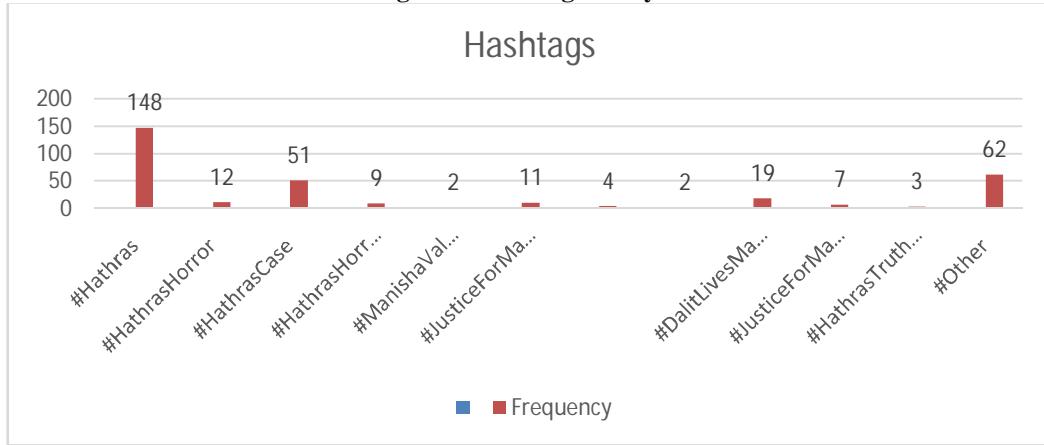


Figure 3 depicts the fact that hashtags like #Hathras and #HathrasCase play a vital role in facilitating real time information to the Twitter users across the world. Rogers’ Diffusion of Innovation Theory (2003) could be taken as conventional resource which advocates hashtags as the driving factors in diffusing the information and thus influence other group of Twitter users for mobilisation and protest **Invalid source specified.**

**Table 3: Trending Hashtags**

S.No	Trending Hashtags	Mentions
1	#hathras	1273
2	#hathrasCase	400
3	#ragulgandhi	213
4	#uttarpradesh	175
5	#hathrashorror	159
6	#priyankagandhi	138
7	#justiceformanishavalmiki	122
8	#watch	121
9	#republictv	119
10	#yogiadityanath	116
11	#news	116
12	#india	113

In order to validate the reliability of the manual content analysis of hashtags, an automated online portal, Brand24 has been used to analyse the hashtags between 14th September and 14th October and the data was retrieved on 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2020 **Invalid source specified.** Table 3 portrays the trending hashtags such as #Hathras and #HathrasCase in Brand24.com online portal which thus validates the reliability of the manual content analysis of the hashtags which also postulates #Hathras and #HathrasCase as the prominent trending hashtags.

### 3.3.4 Identifying the Key Players

A 19-year-old Dalit girl of Hathras who was assaulted and raped by upper caste men died in the hospital on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2020. This heinous act inflicted upon the 19-year-old Dalit girl stirred nation-wide protest both online and offline. Journalists,



Celebrities, prominent media agencies and commoners promptly came out with up-to-date news and views on the issue. Twitter handles loaded with texts, hyperlinks, images and videos along with the hashtags such as #Hathras, #HathrasCase, #HathrasHorror, #HathrasHorrorShocksIndia, #JusticeForManishaValmiki, #DalitLivesMatter etc helped to reach out the issue and its severity to thousands of people.

Table 4: Top Key Players

S.No	Top Public Profiles	Influence
1	ZeeNews	7.3M
2	timesofindia	4.5M
3	indiatvnews	990334
4	dna	747845
5	madukishwar	347963
6	NewsNationTV	139168
7	polimernews	131390
8	TV9Marathi	62204
9	AsianetNewsML	56846
10	LiveLawIndia	46208
11	Punjabkesari	30814
12	TV9Bharatvarsh	21760

In order to trace out the key players who were mostly active in disseminating contents related to #HathrasRapeCase in Twitter are identified through Brand24, an online twitter analysis portal and the data was retrieved on 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2020 **Invalid source specified..** The top public profiles in Twitter are found out and enumerated in the table 4. Brand24.com analysis also gives the brief of the influence rate of the top public profiles.

Table 4 enumerates the key players and important influencers in disseminating news and views about Hathras Rape Case between 14th September and 14th October. ZeeNews, timesofindia, indiatvnews, dna, madukishwar are few of the leading Twitter accounts which stand first in circulating matters related to Hathras Rape Case.

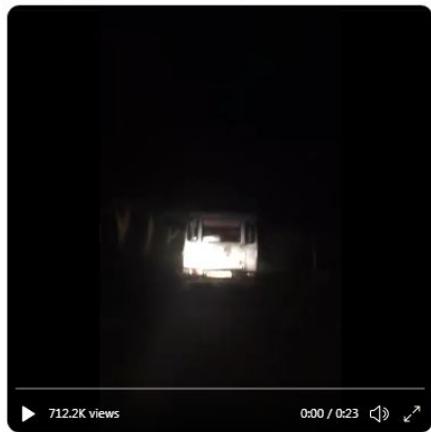
### 3.3.5 Identifying the Frequency of Tweets

The 19-year-old young Dalit girl who had been allegedly gang raped in Boolagarhi of Hathras succumbed to her injuries and died in Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2020 **Invalid source specified..** The girl's body was burned by the cops early in the morning of 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2020 without the knowledge of the family members **Invalid source specified..** Tanushree Pandey, the India Today's journalist who closely covered the Hathras Rape Case, followed the police ambulance which carried the dead body of the rape victim and updated the entire happenings in her Twitter account. These happenings were retweeted and mentioned several times by thousands of people. Thus, Twitter flared up immediately from early morning of 30<sup>th</sup> September with trending hashtags and several political clarifications.



Tanushree Pandey @TanushreePande · Sep 30

HAPPENING NOW — #Hathras rape victim's body has reached her native village, Boolgari in Hathras, where the horrific incident took place. SP, DM, Joint Magistrate all here accompanying the family. My camera person Wakar and I will get you all the updates all through the night



712.2K views

0:00 / 0:23



Tanushree Pandey @TanushreePande · Sep 30

ABSOLUTELY UNBELIEVABLE - Right behind me is the body of #HathrasCase victim burning. Police barricaded the family inside their home and burnt the body without letting anybody know. When we questioned the police, this is what they did.



3.4M views

0:03 / 2:20

966

10.9K

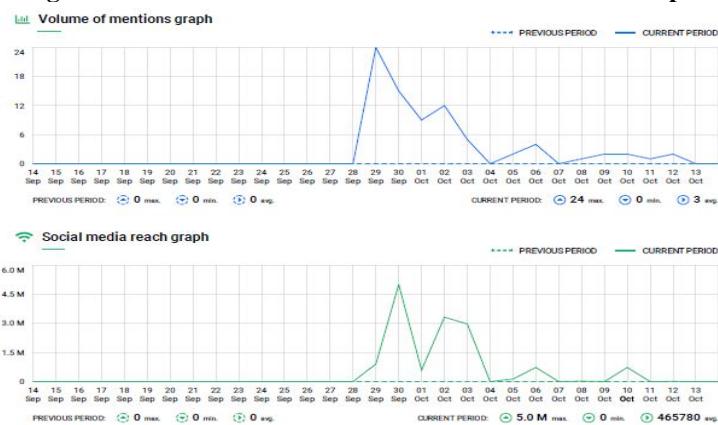
19.4K

4.5K

38.9K

55.2K

**Figure 4: Volume of Mention and Social media Reach Graph**



Source: Figure 4 is obtained from

Volume of mention and Social Media Reach graph, Figure 4 helps us to identify the frequency of tweets during the time between 28<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2020. The graph very vividly picturises the frequency of tweets and its reach. This also assists us to associate and correlate the volume and frequency of tweet's reach and the protest against Hathras Rape Case in various parts of the country.

### 3.4 Cyber-Activism and Hathras Rape Case Protest

Cyber-activism in the virtual space has been influencing societies across the globe in forming social movements for a cause. Sandoval defines Cyber-activism as “using the internet to gather political information, to discuss political issues, and to perform acts of dissent online” (Sandoval Almazan, 2013). Thus, Cyber-activism is an act of dissents who use cyber-space to inform, interact and mobilise people for protest for a social or political cause. Some of these dissent movements are Tunisian, Egyptian, Mexican, Arab Spring Uprising etc. Twitter has been used as effective tool to plan, organise and to announce the development of the protest in various social movements.

There are already various extant studies which proved the correlation between cyber-activism and protest. Among 70 street demonstrations from 2004 – 2011 in Egypt 54 of them were organised online **Invalid source specified.** #Oct26Driving is another Twitter campaign through social media claiming Saudi Women’s right to Drive during 2013 (Tokdemir, 2016). Through Social media



platforms thousands of people gathered and protested at Marina Beach in Chennai and protested to withdraw the ban on Jallikattu on 21st January in 2017 (Maitra, 2018). The Umbrella movement got intensified through cyber space when ‘the 2017 Chief Executive proposed electoral reform’ was made against the Basic Law and the National People’s Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) decisions in Hong Kong (Chan, 2014).

Identifying and analysing the Twitter themes, tweet formats, hashtags, key influencers and the frequency of tweets postulate close association and correlation between Twitter and the Protest against Hathras Rape Case in various parts of the country. Six protests organised by Valmiki Samaj took place in Agra on Sep 29. Indian National Congress protestet in Hathras on Sep 30. Samajwadi party protested in Lucknow on Oct 2, where in “Samajwadi Party workers were lathicharged by police in Hazratganj while they were taking out protest march against Hathras gang-rape incident”, reported Press Trust of India on Oct 2. GRID91 web portal says that there were more than 24 protests in Uttar Pradesh. New Delhi had more than 21 protests in between Sep 29 and Oct 7, according to GRID web portal. ANI News Agency in its Twitter handle in different Tweets reported that CPM General Secretary Sitaram Yechury, CPI leader D Raja, Bhim Army Chief Chandrashekhar Azad, Delhi CM Aravind Kejriwal took part in a protest against Hathras incident, at Jantar Mantar on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2020. Some of the top organisers of protests were All India Students Association (AISA) and Indian National Congress (INC). Mumbai also had more than 30 protests in between Sep 29 and Oct 7. Shiv Sena party workers protested against UP government near Mumbai’s Churchgate railway station on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2020 **Invalid source specified.** Top organisers were Indian National Congress, Shiv SenaPary and Democratic Youth Federation of India. Top Congress leaders like Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra took road rallies to protest against Hathras Gang Rape Case on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2020 **Invalid source specified.** There were few more protests in Kolkata, Pune, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai **Invalid source specified.**

#### 4.0 Conclusion

The qualitative content analysis on tweets with reference to Hathras Rape Case doesn’t endorse that only Twitter could be the ultimate source for initiating and facilitating protest with reference to Hathras rape case. But the findings ensure the role of Twitter as one of the important tools which was used to plan, to mobilise and to update the happening of the Hathras incident and the protest subsequently. The study also finds out that the top most influencers in the Twitter platform are the Media Houses, political parties and Individuals associated with some institutions.

Qualitatively analysing the themes of tweets, the frequency, the formats of tweets, the hashtags and the key influencers in the Twitter with reference to Hathras Rape Case postulate that the Twitter activism and the offline activism has been facilitated and influenced simultaneously; One facilitating and influencing the other at the same time. The offline activism influenced Twitter activism and the Twitter activism influenced offline activism at the same time with reference to Hathras Rape Case.

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