



# UNRAVELING THE NEXUS: SOCIAL MEDIA'S INFLUENCE ON THE ESCALATION OF CYBERCRIMES AGAINST WOMEN IN MANIPUR

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**Abstract:** The surge in social media has sharply boosted cybercrime. Social media platforms, where users interact, share content, and connect, have become hotspots for such activities. Cybercrime on these platforms encompasses harmful actions like threats, defamation, false representation, harassment, and the sharing of malicious content. These activities can damage reputations, cause personal loss, and lead to psychological distress. Unfortunately, women are often targeted by offenders. The study examines the trends of cybercrimes against women on social media in Manipur and explores relevant legal provisions related to such crimes. Primary sources (legal documents, available scientific data, etc.) and secondary sources (journals, articles, etc.) were considered in the study process. This article examines the role of social media in exacerbating cybercrimes against women, drawing on data from the National Crime Report Bureau (NCRB) from 2017 to 2021 and specific case studies. Even though the IPC and IT Act provide a preview of these crimes, there are still gaps in how these offenses are handled directly. This study will help to enlighten the lawmakers and concerned agencies in preparing lawful measures for preventing and strictly curbing these cyber-related offensive activities in times of such crises to save the dignity of women and the right to life and provide relief to the victim. Moreover, it will help guide all women in protecting themselves from being victimized by cybercrime.

**Index Terms-** Cybercrimes, social media, women cyber victims, cyber law, and Manipur.

## I. INTRODUCTION

With technological advancements, social media has become a primary means of communication. Social media depends on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms where individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content (Pathak, 2014). Social media facilitates communication, networking, and information sharing on an unprecedented scale. The same characteristics that draw people to social media -immediate connectedness, broad reach, and safety from such crime; irrespective of caste, race, gender, or age, anyone can become a victim of cybercrime (Ghada, 2019)whereas, condemnably, women have become the top target. It has been reported that approximately 73 % of women experienced some harassment on social media. Only 35% have reported their victimization in India (Halder & Jaishankar, 2010).

However, alongside these benefits, social networking sites have also become breeding grounds for cybercrimes, many of which are aimed at women. In the past decades, the frequency and severity of crime have been on a steep rise. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with technological advancement, a new form of crime known as cybercrime emerged. Cybercrime, commonly known as computer crime, entails the use of electronic/digital technologies by an individual or a group targeting vulnerable individuals

for harassment. It can occur through various mediums, including messages, mail, and video clips. These activities can often impart psychological distress to the victim; sometimes the trauma can last for a lifetime. (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008). As a consequence, these acts can further lead to adverse effects like depression, decline in self-esteem, and a few intense cases, leading to self-harm or even suicide. Victims often experience anxiety, depression, and a profound sense of helplessness (Citron, 2014). The advantage of the cyber culprit lies in the fact that criminal activities remain anonymous, and the crimes through social media spread rapidly with a huge audience (Muttuqin & Ambarwati, 2020). The introduction of the “work from home” tradition over the last two or three years has led to many cyber offenders exploiting people’s vulnerability to execute cybercrime acts such as impersonation, data leaks, etc. (Jain et al., 2020).

Manipur is one of the eight northeastern states of India. It is a state where women are diligent and dedicated to their families. It is known for producing many female athletes at both the National and international levels. For example, the global winners are Mary Kom, Mirabai Chanu, and others. Manipur is also home to the only women-run market in the world, Ima Keithel.

On the one hand, the women of Manipur excel in various fields, but on the other hand, they also represent a vulnerable section of society. Criminals frequently target women because of the disparity between men and women. Cybercrime is just one of the many crimes that primarily target females. Social media has evolved into a tool or a medium for these crimes. Manipur police have arrested numerous perverts for violating cyber laws and cybercrime, such as publishing photos of women in compromising situations on social media without the consent of the women in question (Khumancha & Singh, 2021). It is crucial to characterize cybercrime and understand the victims’ perspectives to save lives from unwanted consequences and develop strategies for the punishment of the culprits.

The objectives of this study include the following-

1. To analyze the role of Social Media platforms in facilitating cybercrimes against women in Manipur.
2. To examine the trend and patterns of cybercrimes against women in Manipur from 2017 to 2021 using NCRB data.
3. To identify the cyber laws of India in handling cybercrime against women.
4. To propose concrete strategies aimed at curbing cybercrime against women in Manipur

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

- a. A doctrinal research approach was used to analyze the legal provisions and their applicability in Manipur.
- b. Using NCRB data, a statistical analysis was conducted to determine the escalation of cybercrime against women from 2017 to 2021. The data was organized by year and types of crime in Manipur, providing a clear picture of the trends over time.
- c. Three Specific cases of cyber-crimes in Manipur involving Social Media platforms were selected for in-depth analysis. These cases were chosen based on their public visibility and relevance to the study, providing qualitative insights into how social media contributes to the perpetration of these crimes

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### a. Cyber-crimes against women: An overview in Manipur

In Manipur, Social Media Platforms have increasingly become hotspots for cybercrimes targeting women, as evidenced by numerous reports in the news and discussions on various social media channels. The alarming rise in such incidents calls for a closer examination of the region's underlying patterns and trends in cybercrime. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the scale and nature of these offenses, the researcher delved into the National Crime Report (NCRB) statistics from 2017 to 2021.

Category	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Cyber blackmail	0	0	0	0	0
Cyber pornography	0	1	1	3	2
Cyberstalking	7	3	0	3	21

Cyber defamation	0	0	0	0	0
Fake profile	1	0	0	0	1
Others	19	5	1	20	15
Total	27	9	2	26	39

Table No. 3.1: NCRB reports of Cybercrime against women in Manipur from 2017 to 2021 (National Crime Report Bureau, 2017-2021)

Table No. 3.1 shows that cyber-crimes against women in Manipur reported cases experienced significant fluctuations over the five years from 2017 to 2021. The initial rise in 2017 was followed by a sharp decline in 2018 and 2019 and then a subsequent spike from 2020 onwards.

In the year 2017, the data could be indicative of the rising misuse of social media platforms to target women, particularly through cyber stalking, fake profiles, and other types of cybercrime. In 2018 and 2019, the number of cases declined, raising questions about potential underreporting. This could reflect a combination of factors such as fear of social stigma, lack of legal awareness, or even dissatisfaction with the law enforcement's response.

The number of cases surged again in 2020, with 26 reported incidents. This increase coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to increased online activity due to lockdowns and work-from-home arrangements. The rise in the use of social media, coupled with the isolation caused by the pandemic, may have created more opportunities for cybercrimes, particularly targeting women. Social media platforms have played a central role in facilitating cybercrimes against women. The steady rise continued into 2021. By 2021, there may have been improved mechanisms for reporting cybercrime, or public campaigns could have encouraged women to come forward. Additionally, the ongoing reliance on digital platforms post-pandemic may have continued to expose women to cyber risks.

#### b. Social Media's role in escalation with case studies

There is a growing trend of using social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp as harassment tools. Women are frequently threatened, blackmailed, or defamed through public posts, private communication, and shared videos or photographs. Rapid content sharing facilitates the spread of such content, leveraging victims' psychological trauma experiences to make such content viral. To obtain further insights into the nature of cybercrimes against women on social media, let's examine some specific cases-

*(The analyzed cases were obtained from records of the Cybercrime Police Station, Manipur, but specific details are withheld to protect the Victim's identity and due to the sensitive nature of the case. The case has been anonymized in the discussion to respect confidentiality.)*

##### Case no 1. Pornography

In 2019, a case was reported in the Cybercrime Police Station in Manipur, concerning the circulation of a video clip containing explicit content. The case arose when a video recording of an intimate moment between two lovebirds was shared widely across WhatsApp. Subsequently, the accused uploaded this private video clip to a WhatsApp group chat, from where it went viral, spreading rapidly across various social media platforms and causing immense distress to the victim.

This case falls under the category of cybercrime, specifically dealing with the unauthorized distribution of sexually explicit content. The sharing of intimate videos without the consent of the parties involved constitutes a violation of privacy and can be classified as a form of pornography.

Moreover, the ease of access to targeting criminals on the internet is one of the most important elements contributing to the surge in crimes. Social media users can create many accounts using fictitious identities, making it more difficult to find criminals. Criminals are encouraged to commit damaging acts because they can act without worrying about facing the consequences immediately.

*Case no. 2- Fake Social Media account used for cyber victimization.*

In a case in Manipur in 2020, an unknown individual created a fake Facebook Account using the identity of a Prominent local businessman. The accused used the businessman's name and profile to make the account appear legitimate. As a well-known figure, the businessman's identity lent credibility to the fake profile, allowing the perpetrator to gain the trust of unsuspecting victims online.

Using this fake account, the perpetrator targeted a woman, engaging with her under the pretense of being a respected businessman. The accused manipulated the woman by making false promises, gaining her confidence, and ultimately exploiting her for personal reasons.

To further deceive the victim, the unknown person obtained a separate WhatsApp number associated with the businessman's name and continued communicating with the victim through that platform. Using both Facebook and WhatsApp, the perpetrator created a convincing narrative that lured the woman into believing that she was interacting with a trustworthy, well-established individual.

This case underscores the growing issue of identity theft on social media and its impact on unsuspecting victims, particularly women. It serves as a reminder of the dangers associated with trusting individuals solely on their social media presence. For the victim, the incident left her feeling vulnerable and violated, as her personal and emotional well-being was deeply affected.

*Case no 3. Morphing, threat, harassment*

In 2019, a disturbing case of cyber harassment unfolded when the victim, a young woman from Manipur, accepted a friend request on Facebook from an account that initially appeared harmless. At first, the interaction was friendly, with the accused using Facebook Messenger to communicate politely. However, the nature of this conversation soon took a dark turn. After a few friendly conversations, the accused began making vulgar comments and using sexist language during calls on Facebook Messenger. The victim immediately disconnected the call and tried to distance herself from further contact.

Unfortunately, the situation escalated quickly. On the same day, the victim received disturbing messages, including edited naked photos of her, which had been manipulated by the accused using pictures downloaded from her Facebook Profile. The fake photos were designed to humiliate and intimidate the victim.

The harassment intensified when the accused started making video calls through WhatsApp, during which he exposed his private parts to the victim. His behavior became increasingly threatening, and he began to demand that the victim reciprocate by showing her private parts during the video call.

The accused did not stop at harassment: he resorted to blackmail. He threatened the victim that if she did not comply with his demands, he would upload fake, explicit photos of her on Facebook and other social media platforms. He further threatens to send these photos to the elders and prominent figures in her village, as well as her friends and family. The clear intent was to disgrace her in her community and cause irreparable damage to her reputation.

The victim was left in a state of intense fear, emotional distress, and humiliation. Not only was she being harassed online, but she also faced the very real threat of social ostracism and public shaming.

The above cases clearly show that social media has significantly contributed to the escalation of cybercrimes against women. In the first case, a video of an intimate moment was maliciously shared on WhatsApp, causing severe emotional harm to the victim, while in the second case, a fake Facebook account was used to impersonate prominent businessmen and manipulate women for personal gain. The third case involved a stranger exploiting social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to harass, blackmail, and intimidate a woman by using edited images and making vulgar threats. These cases highlighted how the misuse of social media can lead to serious violations of privacy, harassment, and emotional trauma, with perpetrators exploiting the anonymity and widespread reach of these platforms to harm their victims.

**c. Legal framework and law**

In India, laws relating to cybercrime provisions applied to cybercrime offenses are the Information Technology Act, of 2000 and the Indian Penal Code of 1860. The Information Technology (Amendment) Act, of 2008, and the Criminal Law Amendment Act,

of 2013, brought some changes and introduced other offenses or even made cyberstalking an offense according to the needs of society and to protect women. In the Amendment made in 2013 in the act, the offense of cyber-stalking was introduced as a criminal offense, but cybercrime against women has not been addressed yet. Nevertheless, there are certain sections under Chapter XI of the act that may provide a remedy for the actions of cybercrime up to some extent.

Provisions under the IT Act and the IPC are as follows

\*Sec 66A deals with the punishment for sending offensive messages through communication services, etc. The offense of this section shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 3 years or with a fine (Information Technology (Amendment) Act, 2008)

\*Sec 66C deals with punishment for identity theft. Offense of this section shall be punishable with either imprisonment up to 3 years or a fine which may extend to one lakh (Information Technology (Amendment) Act, 2008)

\*Sec 66D deals with punishment for cheating by personalization by using computer resources. Offense of this section shall be punishable with either imprisonment up to 3 years or a fine which may extend to one lakh (Information Technology (Amendment) Act, 2008).

\*Sec 66E deals with punishment for violation of privacy. The offense of this section shall be punishable with imprisonment up to 3 years or a fine which may extend to 2 lakhs (Information Technology (Amendment) Act, 2008).

\*Section 72 deals with punishment for Breach of confidentiality and Privacy. The penalty for this offense shall be imprisonment of up to 2 years or a fine of up to 1 lakh (Information Technology Act, 2000).

\* Sec 292A deals with Printing, selling, and advertising grossly indecent or scurrilous matter or matter intended for blackmail. Offenses of this section shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years or with a fine or with both (Indian Penal Code, 1860)

\* Sec 354A deals with sexual harassment of the nature of making sexually colored remarks. Punishment of this section shall be imprisonment, which may extend to 1 year, or a fine, or with both (Indian Penal Code, 1860).

\* Sec 354C deals with voyeurism. It means those who watch or capture the image of a woman engaging in a private act without the permission of the woman shall be punishable with imprisonment not less than 1 year but which may extend to 3 years and with a fine for the first conviction and for the second conviction punishable with imprisonment not less than 3 years but which may extend to 7 years and with fine (Indian Penal Code, 1860).

\* Sec 354D deals with stalking and contacting or attempting to contact a woman. Offense of this section shall be punishable with imprisonment up to 3 years with a fine for a first conviction. For a second conviction, punishable shall be imprisonment up to 5 years with a fine (Indian Penal Code, 1860).

\*Sections 499 and 500 deal with defamation and the punishment of defamation. Sending messages in a defamatory nature through email/messenger or abusing email/messenger. Offense of this section shall be punishable with simple imprisonment for two years or a fine or both (Indian Penal Code, 1860).

\*Section 507 deals with criminal intimidation by anonymous communication. The offense of this section shall be punishable with imprisonment for 2 years (Indian Penal Code, 1860).

\*Section 509 deals with Words, gestures, or acts intended to insult the modesty of women. Offense of this section shall be punishable with simple imprisonment for 3 years with a fine (Indian Penal Code, 1860).

As seen above, the provisions in the IT Act of 2000 and the Indian Penal Code are not specifically directed at cybercrimes against women, but they are applied to such cases due to the general nature of the offenses. These provisions address broader cybercrimes such as identity theft, privacy violations, and harassment, which are often used in cases involving women. However, none of these provisions is exclusively designed for the protection of women in the context of cybercrime. Suryansh (Arora, 2020) stated that Indian laws are not competent enough while dealing with cybercrime, as there is no specific provision in the Information Technology Act 2000. He also further stated that the Government seems to lack the concept of Cyberbullying while drafting or passing the IT Act, and the Indian Penal Code 1860 principal criminal code of India, still needs revision. Besides this, the victims are left with less compensation and hardly any counseling. However, there is no specific law for cyber-related crime made exclusively for women, and so it is high time for new rules to be introduced at the earliest possible to protect the women of our society.

#### d. Prevention and solution

Effectively preventing and combating cybercrimes against women requires a multifaceted strategy that combines public awareness, technology safeguards, and legal reforms.

- i. To ensure that the legal system can fully protect women from crimes like online harassment, cyberstalking, and image-based abuse, gender-specific legislation that specifically addresses these issues must be created in India. Furthermore, the current legislation needs to be revised to reflect current developments.
- ii. It is imperative that enforcement procedures be strengthened. To deal with online crimes, they must have specialized training and cyber domestic instruments. Response time and victim care could be enhanced by a specialized cybercrime cell that focuses on crimes against women.
- iii. Social media sites need to put in place monitoring and reporting tools for stickers to swiftly delete offensive material and stop abusive messages from spreading.
- iv. To teach women about online safety practices, including privacy settings, spotting scams, and reporting procedures, public awareness campaigns are essential. Women can be better equipped to use social media and defend themselves from dangers by participating in digital literacy programs.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the escalating instances of cybercrime against women in Manipur, as reflected in both NCRB reports and specific case studies, underscore the significant role of social media in facilitating these offenses. Platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp have become breeding grounds for identity theft, cyberstalking, and image-based abuse, as seen in the cases of intimate videos being shared, fake accounts impersonating public figures, and blackmail using doctored photos. Despite the existence of legal frameworks such as the IT Act of 2000 and provisions in the IPC, these laws are broad and not specifically designed to address the unique vulnerabilities of women in the digital space. While Sections like 66C, 66E, and 67A of the IT Act and 354D and 509 of the IPC are applied to such cases, the lack of gender-specific legislation creates gaps in adequately addressing and curbing cybercrimes targeting women. The analysis highlights the urgent need for stronger, more focused legal provisions and improved enforcement to protect women from the growing menace of social media-facilitated cybercrimes.

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