

Queer Stigma on Social Media: A Sentiment Analysis of Youtube Video Comments

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Abstract

This paper is based on a sentiment analysis conducted on comments of YouTube videos about the Supreme Court of India's verdict of October 17, 2023 concerning the legalisation of same-sex marriage. The paper attempts to analyse the prevalence of anti-queer sentiments in online comments and understand them in context of the social stigma surrounding the queer community in India. First, the prevalence of anti-queer sentiments, pro-queer sentiments and neutral sentiments are quantified. Second, the different themes significant to a particular sentiment are identified. Finally, the relevance of anti-queer sentiments in propagation of messages stigmatising the queer community is discussed.

Keywords – Queer, LGBTQ+, Social Stigma, Communication, Sentiment Analysis

1. Introduction

The past few decades have observed continued scholarship in the area of gender studies and queer theory. It has been able to highlight the fluid nature of gender identities and sexualities which is reflected in the spectrum that terminologies like LGBTQAI+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Asexual, and Intersex) try to express (Butler, 1993; Doty, 1995). The point of similarity among all these identities is the non-conformation of individuals to the norms of gender and sexuality associated with their assigned sex. This is also the point where the basis of social stigma against queer individuals is created.

In more recent times and in the Indian context, the issue of legal recognition of same-sex marriages has once again made headlines. The October 17, 2023 verdict of the Supreme Court of India refused to grant legal recognition to same-sex marriages in the country, sparking discussions online.

Where strong opinions are being vocalised both for and against the issue, it is an opportunity to study the attitudes of common individuals about the queer community. Thus, a sentiment analysis was conducted online, through the selection of a social media platform considering how such platforms provide individuals the space to voice their opinions more freely.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Stigma and its communication

Stigma can be viewed in two ways – i) as a discrediting attribute and ii) as a social phenomenon involving discriminatory attitudes towards the discrediting attribute. In the case of sexual minorities, the minority identity is itself a stigma, an attribute that the individual possesses that discredits them and devalues them from a whole individual to a lesser, tainted one (Goffman, 1963). Why does this attribute warrant such strong negative emotions? The answer to this lies in the deviance from social norms. Individuals deviating

from our dominant social norms – our conventions, beliefs, rules and traditions that are constructed to provide us with a sense of stability – cause us anxiety in cases of deviations and highlight contradictions that we cannot resolve, which finally causes us to shun such individuals and drive them out of our sight. This is how stigma is created, and later communicated amongst like-minded members of society, and enacted against the “deviants” (Goffman, 1963; Smith, 2007).

Thus a division is caused between “us” and “them”, the “normal” and the “stigmatised”, the “majority” and “minority”. As per Bruce Link & Jo Phelan (2001), stigmatisation occurs when human variations are differentiated and labelled, when existing cultural beliefs about these labels get associated with the labelled attributes, a separation occurs between the labelled individuals or group and the general society (‘us’ and ‘them’) and consequently, the labelled individuals experience a loss of status and discrimination which leads to inequalities.

Two important reasons behind the construction and sharing of stigma messages may be considered here, taken from the works of Rachel Smith (2007) on stigma communication. First, stigma messages are constructed to provide reasons for barring the access of stigmatised groups from society (Smith, 2007). Thus, they engage in stereotyping and propagating prejudice. Second, these messages spread easily among the “majority” or the “normal” because such stigma messages invoke emotions such as anger, fear, and disgust that are more likely to be passed on and that create consistent emotional reactions that spur bonding (Smith, 2007).

Keeping these theoretical constructs in minds, an examination of social media messages about the queer community in India helps us understand the attitudes of common individuals towards the community.

2.2 Queer Stigma on Social Media

Past studies have attempted to study online stigmatisation through analysis of content from different social media platforms. Common forms of online stigmatization include hate speech and discrimination. A study based in Brazil analysed the comments made on news posts on Facebook for hate speech against the LGBT population. A thematic analysis of these comments revealed 9 categories of hate speech that included victimization (heterosexuals being victims and laws for LGBT population being a privilege), pathologisation (where queerness is portrayed as an illness or anomaly), sickened by the existence of or upset by the attitudes of LGBT people, discrediting the journalistic content, media outlet or writer of the news (to downplay the newsworthiness of LGBT issues), insults or offense against human dignity (which attack an LGBT individuals dignity), imposing morality and personal religious beliefs (portraying LGBT community as one composed of sinners), biological approach (questioning the naturalness of queerness), supposed influence of behaviour and thinking of children and adolescents (implying that children who observe homosexuals will become homosexuals), and opinions aided by quoting authority (quoting supposed experts to devalue the legitimacy of queerness) (Silva & Silva, 2021).

In a European study based in Cyprus, news articles concerning the LGBT community with the most number of associated comments were collected, and the comments were analysed. In how the LGBT community was talked about, 4 frames were identified that included – safety/security (arguments based on non-heterosexuals being predators), family values and morality, majority v/s minority rules, and pathology (Baider, 2018).

The implications of online stigma on mental health of LGBTQ+ populations have also been attempted to be studied. Through an analysis of 350 posts from the social media platform Reddit (subreddit r/lgbt), a study utilised the Minority Stress Model (Meyer, 2003) to identify minority stressors such as prejudice

events, perceived stigma and internalised LGBTphobia (Saha et al., 2019). Another study conducted in Israel collected data from over a thousand Israeli LGB individuals to examine the association of 18 forms of discrimination and mental distress across Facebook, dating platforms, and offline (Marciano & Antebi-Gruszka, 2020).

3. Methodology

Are anti-queer sentiments commonly held by individuals? How are they expressed? To answer these questions, the following objectives were formulated for this study -

1. To quantify the presence of messages stigmatising the queer community/queer individuals against non-stigmatising messages.
2. To study the expressions of anti-queer sentiments on social media.
3. To study the common labels and stereotypes attached to the community in these stigmatising comments.

3.1 Data Collection

YouTube was chosen as the platform for data collection for this study. A survey by Comscore, a global media measurement and analytics company, revealed that every four out of five internet users in India, above the age of 18, use YouTube (Mishra, 2023). The technical and policy constraints of other more popular social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp) also led to the decision of choosing YouTube as the site for data collection.

The key words “LGBTQ + India” were used to run an initial search through the YouTube search bar on November 14, 2023. A filter was applied according to the upload date of videos which was limited to “This month”. The videos were sorted as per YouTube’s default setting of “Relevance”. The first five videos from the search results which had its comments sections activated were selected.

All the videos selected happened to be news reports discussing the implications of the October 17, 2023 verdict of the Supreme Court of India which had ruled against legalising same-sex marriage in the country. The videos varied in length ranging from 54 second to 9 minutes 27 seconds. The comments of each video were scraped and the corpus of comments collected served as the content for coding and analysis. A total of 887 comments were thus collected to form the initial dataset.

4.2 Data Coding and Analysis

Aspect Based Sentiment Analysis (ABSA) developed from earlier experiments in Natural Language Processing (NLP) in mining and summarising the sentiments and opinions of customers about products on e-commerce platforms (Hu & Liu, 2004). Where sentiment analysis would convey the overall positive or negative tonality of a given sentence or document, ABSA would help express this sentiment for a particular aspect or attribute and is thus, a more fine-grained method of analysis (Zhang et al., 2022). Although no NLP technology was used for coding the comments, the ABSA concept was used to categorise each comment, where “queerness” was considered as the aspect of interest. Thus, all comments collected were coded as “pro-queer sentiment”, “anti-queer sentiment” or “neutral sentiment”.

The locus standi of commenters, their attitudes or intentions behind comment were not investigated, therefore, posted comments were coded as they appeared. All codes were manually assigned on the ATLAS.ti software. In the initial reading of comments collected, duplicate comments were identified and removed from the dataset. Further, comments unrelated to the subject of queer community/ queer

individuals/ queer rights, along with comments that dealt with interpersonal conflicts between two or more commenters on unrelated issues were identified and removed from the dataset. Thus the final dataset which has been used for analysis consisted a total of 722 comments made across five YouTube videos.

5. Results

As one would expect considering the socio-cultural climate of India and the attitudes of most Indians towards the LGBTQ+ community, comments stigmatising the community were found expressed in significant numbers in the dataset. These stigmatising comments are represented by the “anti-queer sentiment” code allotted. Similarly, the non-stigmatising comments are represented by the “pro-queer sentiment” code.

Sentiment	Video 1	Video 2	Video 3	Video 4	Video 5	Total Number of Comments	Percentage
Anti-Queer	223	87	1	1	66	378	52.4%
Pro-Queer	158	70	0	0	57	285	39.4%
Neutral	24	25	0	3	7	59	8.2%
Total	405	182	1	4	130	722	

In all videos selected for analysis, messages stigmatising the queer community were in clear majority with the number of comments expressing anti-queer sentiments significantly exceeding the number of comments expressing pro-queer sentiments.

Anti-Queer Sentiments

Comments that lauded the decision of the Supreme Court, used derogatory or abusive language towards queer individuals/community, and expressed heteronormative beliefs were coded with “anti-queer” sentiment. A significant number of such comments *advocated for binary norms*, expressing the belief that only two sexes and genders exist were the opposites attract sexually – deviation from this norm simply being wrong. Queerness is therefore going against nature. Marriage was argued to be the union of “a man and a woman” for the purpose of procreation. Support for marriage rights not being granted to same-sex couples on the basis of such heteronormative beliefs were reflected in comments such as:

1:44 There are only two genders...and to be gay, it's wrong, it is nothing but pathetic gratification and confusion. Now there are certain degrees of wrong, I believe gay is not wrong enough to be behind bars but definitely somewhere along the lines of re-schooling and rehabilitation.

1:190 Marriage is between a male and a female. Sex is between these 2 people. Imagine 2 men having SEX disgusting.

1:19 Procreate??? can u create a baby just becous u marry??? These Alphabet community are off their mind

1:200 Heterosexual couples & gay couples are not equal to each other. One can naturally procreate, the other can't. That's a pretty big and fundamental difference. So not giving them equal rights is understandable & justified. Marriage has for ages been seen as a union between a man and a woman and I'm glad that the traditional definition of what a marriage is, is preserved and not changed to appease the woke alphabet LGBWTF mafia with their degenerate agenda. India avoided becoming like the degenerate woke West and those who are upset about that can go cry me a river.

Another largely expressed argument was that queerness is *not a part of Indian culture or accepted by religion*. On this basis, same-sex unions, homosexuality, transgenderism, and other expressions of queerness are believed to hold no socio-cultural or religious validity.

1:500 Every country has their culture; in Indian culture it's not been accepted. In the name of equality & freedom anyone can do anything in India, it's not acceptable! I support SC decision.

2:163 Well done, India. Hold fast and stay strong. Never forget your ancestral values!

Commenters expressing anti-queer sentiments also seemed to see queerness as a western concept, associating with a leftist, liberal propaganda of 'wokeness'.

1:445 America is suffering from this woke leftist propaganda, hope it doesn't come here.

Comments expressing anti-queer sentiments often employed *hate speech* with abusive/offensive language, derogatory slurs and associated the community with degeneracy. LGBTQ+ community and its members were stated as perverts, immoral, diseased and mentally sick persons. Further, such language featured queer slurs and labels ridiculing queer individuals.

1:54 मौगा लोग का अलग अस्थान है समाज में। नाच गाना करे ज्यादा फुदके नहीं।

(These gays have a separate position in society. Sing and dance, don't reach out of your bounds)

1:56 Great decision. To all lgtv, don't spread your woke bullshit and HIV cases in this country. Get some help

1:312 Idea mat de inlogo ko. Kal ko beastiality bhi justify kar denge bolke ki- "I recognize as an animal"inko bkchdi karne ki gandi adat lagi hui hai

(Don't give these people ideas. Tomorrow, they will justify beastiality by saying "I recognize as an animal". They have a bad habit of stirring things up.)

5:42 It's like cancer in every country. Sick minded people.

This hate against the LGBTQ+ individuals is also evident in how some commenters even believed that queer individuals should leave the country or even be killed.

1:17 Same sex marriage should never be approved. If anyone comes in for protest or found to be in relationship then they should be murdered along with their parents. Inefficient parents are tomorrow's trouble makers. All LGBTQ+ FUCKU should be killed. Such mental conditions should be eradicated.

1:205 please leave our beautiful country, don't ruin it then

1:238 Bro leave India, we don't need people like you here.

Other comments that mocked or abused queer allies were also coded with "anti-queer sentiment".

Pro-Queer Sentiments

Comments that spoke positively of queer individuals, expressed empathy for the community, or defended their rights were coded with "pro-queer sentiment".

Pro-queer sentiments were broadly expressed through *support for the queer community and their rights*, or as *counterarguments* to anti-queer statements made in the comments. The *support for the queer community/rights* was most commonly observed in comments which articulated disagreement with the Supreme Court verdict that denied marriage rights to same-sex couples in India. These comments often conveyed that same-sex couples should not be discriminated against as they are simply two people in love. Such comments also implied that the judgement is intrusive with regards to personal freedom and privacy of individuals – love, co-living, and marriage being personal matters. Support for marriage rights were observed in comments such as:

1:52 Marriage must occur out of LOVE. SC verdict is a bloody rejection of lgbtq+ community. Law and order must be same for both straight and the other communities. This world is not only meant for only the majorities. And we are no one to decide the future of LGBTQ+ community.

5:1 There's no reason to have any marriage unrecognised on the basis of the sex of the participants. The government has no business in that equation and neither does anyone else who isn't in that marriage.

Further, this support was also observed in comments that called for indiscriminate laws for the queer community and spoke against humiliation and bullying of LGBTQ+ identifying individuals. Few such comments also encouraged queer individuals in their fight for rights.

1:79 What according to you is culture?? Making fun and humiliating and bullying people depriving the basic rights of people, or giving homosexuality the term a bad trend?? I think this is the meaning of the term culture according to you.

1:327 People will troll. Regardless of the verdict, it is a huge step forward. Don't lose your shine.

1:347 India tere baap ka nahi hai. I support indiscriminate society.

The above comment translates to – India is not owned by your father. I support indiscriminate society. The implication is that India as a country does not belong to any one individual, therefore every citizen has equal rights in the country. This further implies that logically, there is no basis for discrimination between individuals (in this case on the basis of sexual orientation), validating the commenter's support for an indiscriminate society.

A second type of pro-queer sentiments expressed in comments were in the form of *counterarguments*, articulated in reaction to statements kept forth in anti-queer comments. These anti-queer statements majorly argued that (a) queer individuals cannot procreate and therefore must not be married (b) queerness is not natural (c) queerness is a western concept that has never been a part of Indian history, culture or religion. In response, pro-queer comments countered these beliefs and opinions by discussing alternatives to procreation (adoption, surrogacy etc.), reasons for demanding marriage rights that went beyond procreation, offering explanations about the naturalness of homosexuality, and by presenting historical and mythological examples as proof that queerness has indeed always been a part of Indian culture and religion. Few comments in this regard are as follows:

1:173 They want legal marriage because 1. So that they can claim each other's properties 2. In case of medical emergency, they can sign as spouse 3. They can have children through surrogacy, then those children will need a stable family. That's why legal marriage.

2:19 Tell me you're uneducated without telling me you're uneducated. There are many cases in which homosexuality asexuality agenderism are found in NATURE (+ humans are animals and aka nature. Even that solely proves homosexuality is natural) There are almost 4 million orphans in the world. And many researches have showed that a child does not specifically need a mother and a father, just 2 loving beings. And in Indian law and in HINDUISM (which is a religion followed in India not assuming you're Hindu) It is not specified the gender of the people being married (law always uses the terms both parties) (In Hinduism marriage is a union of 2 SOULS).

5:83 1) Lord Agni had both husband and wife 2) In shiv puran, lesbians are mentioned 3) Kamasutra discusses homosexuality 4) Khajuraho temples 5) Lord Shri Krishna's Mohini avatar during sumudra manthan and Kurukshetra war 6) Aardnareshwar 7) Shikhandi and many more. . . Our culture never opposed homosexuality and transgenders Kab Tak ignorance Mai rahoge?? (For how long will you stay ignorant?) And even on moral grounds, if anyone is not harming people and is contributing to the society,

then why do people oppose them to live how they want and be happy? The homophobes in comment section make me sick!!

Further to this, comments that empathised with or shared the pain of being a queer individual were also coded as ones expressing “pro-queer sentiment”.

Neutral Sentiments

Comments that spoke of facts related to the judgement without undermining the queer community or explicitly supporting them, or that defended the judgement without undermining the queer community were coded with a “neutral sentiment”.

2:121 I think they didn't hear the judgement properly. The court refused to give adoption rights to them by 3-2. Basically 2 judgements came, the court refused to legalise same sex marriage by 5-0. So, all justice opposed it. Then for adoption rights. That was also opposed but this time by 3-2. 2 justices supported giving adoption right but 3 didn't supported so by 3-2 it was denied too. So I don't know what the guy at 1-minute mark (in the video) is saying.

2:125 They can only interpret laws that are currently on the books. They can't simply make up laws. It's job of legislature to do that.

Discussion

In societies around the globe, socio-cultural roles, behaviours and attitudes are chiefly framed around heterosexual norms. The Indian society is not an exception. The roots of heteronormativity can indeed be traced back to patriarchy and capitalism. As Judith Butler (1993) argued “there is no reason to divide up human bodies into male and female sexes except that such a division suits the economic needs of heterosexuality and lends a naturalistic gloss to the institution of heterosexuality”. The model of sex and gender, claims the former to be natural and the latter to be cultural, establishing the ideas of two “biological” sexes and consequently guaranteeing the binary gender system. Further, the establishment of these binary genders, male and female, has allowed for cultural meanings to be attached to the sexed body in such a way that it “naturalises” the power of one (the masculine) over the other (the feminine).

So what does the idea that biological sex, as Butler further argues, too is not natural but rather “naturalised” by culture do? It logically discredits the binary gender model, opening up our imagination and acceptance towards the possibility of the spectrum of genders and sexualities existing not as an aberration to a rule, but as the rule itself. It challenges the very idea of heteronormativity and threatens the positions of power, whether gained or granted, benefiting its possessors. Hence, such an idea holds the potential to upset entire systems that are based on heteronormativity. For this very reason, the very idea of gender and sexuality being fluid will not be accepted ‘laying down’ for hetero norms have been internalised by us through cultural performances. These cultural performances (Butler, 1999) and the roles assigned to the binary genders have informed individual decisions of what the sexed body wears, how it behaves, and even who it loves. Queerness, which exists in stark contrast to heteronormativity, creates discomfort and even fear. It is a direct reaction to the dissonance created in the social mind that is essentially conformed to heteronormativity and cannot stand such deviance.

To ease this distress caused by the deviance, and to ensure the correctness of its own beliefs and attitudes, the majority engages in the process of stigma creation that mainly aims at discrediting the deviant (here sexual minorities). Creation of and propagation of stigma messages, that serve as vehicles for spreading derision for the targeted community, play a key role in the sustenance of this stigma and a subsequent loss of status of the group. In this study of the comments on YouTube videos about the Supreme Court of

India's ruling on same-sex marriage, clear reflections of stigma surrounding the LGBTQ+ community in India are observed.

Common stereotypes and labels attached

The devaluation of the queer community is chiefly observed in the use of labels that are attached and referring to stereotypes associated with the community. Faggot, *mauga*, *chhakka*, *gud*, *hijra* are labels that have been commonly attached to gay men to undermine their masculinity. Because they are gay, they are 'less of a man' compared to hetero-men – something greatly to be ashamed of in a patriarchal society which thrives on the expression of masculine power. The notion of gay men being less of a man can be understood through the heteronormative obsessions of the patriarchal man. A sexual relationship itself is an example of power play, of domination and submission, where the man dominates (through penetration during intercourse) and the woman is dominated (the role assigned per her sexed body). Thus in a sexual relationship between two men, one must 'play the part of a woman', making that man less of a man, equating him with the 'weaker, second sex'. However, these words do not simply express a weakened masculinity, but also a disgust for the same – playing the part of a woman is a shameful, distasteful erotic fantasy. Other terms observed in the comments devalued the queer community in general. LGTV, alphabet community, wifi password community, LGBWTF – these labels were all used in a manner that ridiculed the LGBTQ+. LG, a multinational electronics brand, is popular in India for its televisions; using LGTV to talk about the LGBT community is a clear mockery of queer individuals. LGWTF (LG – What the F**k) comprises the vulgar slang WTF to convey a derisive incredulity towards the community. It also indicates the shock the commenter feels about the whole idea of homosexuality. The labels 'alphabet community' and 'wifi password' community mock the queer community on the number of identities being presented by the collective term LGBTQIA+ (with the + indicating many more identities).

An analysis of the comments also revealed stereotypes commonly attached to the community which included those of mental sickness, immorality, disease, and criminality. Phrases such as "they should seek psychiatric help" and "mentally sick people" that "are playing stupid pronoun game" indicate the perception that queerness is but a psychiatric problem. This pathologisation of queerness and its association with mental sickness makes the issue of queer rights more problematic, as mental health and sickness have its own stigmas that then get extended and applied to the queer community as well. This also explains the fear that many leaning towards heteronormativity feel when confronted with events where queer community voices its opinions (through public protests, interviews, talks, or even posts/comments on social media platforms) – after all, mentally sick people are perceived as mad people that can get out of control any time (Grover et al., 2020; Rose et al., 2007; Venkatesh et al., 2015).

A significant portion of anti-queer comments spoke of the LGBTQ+ community as being highly promiscuous, sinful, unethical and evil – all words that build an image of immorality alongside the image of the queer individual. The component of promiscuity in particular has been used to establish queer individuals as sex-crazed persons with no boundaries, ones who would even engage in intercourse with animals and demand rights for the same in future. These notions are illustrated in the following comments: ". . . & then spreading viruses diseases parasites bacterias fungus & so on & then queer having sex with animals . . ."

"*Idea mat de in logo ko. Kal ko beastiality bhi justify kar denge ye bolke ki – I recognize as an animal....inko bkchdi karne ki gandi adat lagi hui hai*" (Don't give these people ideas. Tomorrow, they will justify beastiality by saying "I recognize as an animal". They have a bad habit of stirring things up.)

Consequently, this image creation of the queer as an immoral, promiscuous pervert eases the process of attaching yet another stereotype to the community – that of disease. It was observed that not only was the queer community accused of spreading sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as HIV-AIDS, they were also likened to a disease. Thus, with phrases such as “This LGBT is demonic and a virus against humanity”, queerness was claimed by those expressing anti-queer sentiments to be a virus which is spreading immorality and evil that will destroy humanity. A particular comment stylised pride month in the following way – “priDEMONth” – indicating a glaring demon hidden in the most celebrated events expressing queerness.

Using queer identities as slurs

As discussed in the previous section, certain labels are attached to the community that are used to question the masculinity of an individual, attacking them on being a lesser man. These terms are used as slurs in an attempt to devalue the targeted individual. However, even accepted LGBTQ+ identities and terminologies are used as slurs. “*Hiding in the closet*”, “*Closet Hijada*”, “*Gay*” were some terms used as slurs, recorded in the current analysis. *Hijada/Hijra* is a common term associated with the transgender community of India. *Hijra* is a tradition with its own religious and cultural customs. However, being a community of intersexed, and transgender persons, it is feared and stigmatised for its gender transgressions, and threatening the ideas of masculinity and femininity.

A curious case representing an amalgam of homophobia and support for queer community was observed in the comments which requires to be mentioned here. The following comments were made by an individual calling out a homophobe for their anti-queer comments –

1:356 waise tujhe gandphati isliye hui hai coz tu h0m0ph0b!c hai. Tere jese log hi ye sab over oppose karke koshish karte hai hide karne ki ki tujhe ladke pasand hai. Closet hijada.

(You have such a problem because you are homophobic. People like you over oppose to hide that you like guys. Closet Hijra.)

1:358 I only decoded and revealed what you are hiding in your closet lol.

1: 379 nalla aur sadakchap toh tu hai Jo college romance type faaltu chize dekhta hai aur ussi se gyaan bhi leta hai. WhatsApp University ko IIT Bombay bolte sharam nahi aayi? Jo mene upar likha hai uske baare me research kar aur knowledge le. Aur closet se bahar Nikal. Tere jese phati g@nd leke closet me rehne waale kinnar hi sabse zyada acting karte hai so that mard lag sake. (You are jobless and cheap who watches college romance type useless things and gains knowledge from that. Didn't you feel ashamed calling WhatsApp University the IIT Bombay? Research about what I have written above and gain knowledge. And step out of the closet. Closeted transgender like you pretend the most so that you seem like a man). U are like that Bankura guy above. Bodybuilding, speaking anti lgbt so that nobody can doubt about you being gay.

What was curious was how the commenter, on the one hand, was calling out a homophobe about vehemently speaking against the LGBTQ+, but, on the other hand, did so in a way that devalued the queer group by using LGBTQ terms as slurs against the homophobe. Even though the intention seems to be to support the queer rights by devaluing homophobic individuals, such devaluation is occurring at the cost of the dignity of the queer community. Therefore, such comments were also coded as showcasing “anti-queer sentiment”.

Apologists

Finally, few comments represented an apologist standpoint wherein they defended the Supreme Court verdict such as in the comment below:

1:498 This is a great quantum jump for India which has very strong Hindu religion and it is a great balance at this stage. It takes many years for India to adapt & evolve & understand & accept.

The comment makes the verdict seem positive, where queer issues have been raised and acknowledged to some degree. Calling the judgement “a great quantum jump” and “a great balance at this stage” however attempts to gloss over the fact that same-sex marriage remains illegal and queer rights remain unequal in the wake of heterosexual norms. For this reason, such apologist comments were also coded as representing ‘anti-queer sentiments’.

Conclusion

The study of comments made on YouTube videos discussing same-sex marriage verdict in India through the conduct of sentiment analysis helped in estimating the presence of messages stigmatising the queer community/queer individuals against non-stigmatising messages. While majority of the comments represented an anti-queer stance, pro-queer comments constituted 39.4% of total comments which is quite substantial. However, the context of the comments becomes important here, in that these were made under videos that followed a news format and discussed a verdict of national importance – a space conducive for debate and discussion. Would a similar proportion of comments be observed in videos presenting queer individuals, community or issues in different formats and contexts, for example, in fictional videos with an effeminate character or a transwoman showcasing her dancing talents?

The current study also contributed to knowledge on the expressions of anti-queer sentiments on social media. The assessment of common labels and stereotypes attached to the community in the stigmatising comments also led to one more observation, perhaps due to the sheer magnitude of negative comments, pro-queer comments seemed to be positioned in a defensive stance, offering counterarguments and explanations to anti-queer claims while engaging in one-to-one exchanges with people expressing anti-queer sentiments.

An array of strategies were observed in these one-to-one conversations – offering logical explanations, voicing the hardships faced by queer individuals, shaming homophobes; however none of these strategies worked in persuading the other side. No matter the arguments offered, persons expressing anti-queer sentiments, stuck to their opinions.

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