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Virus, Violence and (In)Visible Women: #LockDownMeinLockUp and Embodied Resistance During COVID-19

By Ishani Mukherjee¹

Abstract

Drawing on the #LockDownMeinLockUp visual campaign against domestic violence, this paper conceptually leverages embodied resistance, performed connectivity, and (in)visibility politics to explore how gender, body, power, affect, celebrity, performance, and injustice are framed by digital media in the context of an unprecedented global health crisis. The forms, forces, and incidences of domestic violence (DV) are rooted in local power relations and unique cultural practices and so should their interventions and representations be. Since the March 2020 lockdown, the pandemic worsened the conditions of DV victims in India. Many women were forced to cohabit with abusive partners and families. Data on the frequency of violence against women (VAW) in India confirms that reported cases of DV increased 131% by May 2020 in areas with strict lockdown mandates. Media coverage has also prioritized the health and economic implications of COVID-19, and little notice has been given to the impact of the pandemic on Indian women and their daily and layered oppressions. At this juncture, select NGOs, digital platforms, and celebrities have taken to advocating against the abuse that Indian women are facing during the pandemic, of which the Instagram hashtivism #LockDownMeinLockUp is a potent exemplar. Based on an inductive thematic analysis of 1,624 Instagram images (May-December 2020) related to the #LockDownMeinLockUp hashtivism, its celebrity selfies, and digital posters, this study reveals four themes relating to representations of and interventions against DV on Indian women during the pandemic, including: (1) names, stories, and victim visibility; (2) violence visuals; (3) celebrity selfie-resistance; and (4) action, connection, and transformation. In offering visual immediacy, connective visibility, and affective mobilization against DV amidst India's lockdown, the #LockDownMeinLockUp campaign surfaces as a tool of localized activism. The short-term material impact is the digital campaign's success in fundraising for DV interventions and peri- and post-pandemic care and safety measures for many abused women. Yet, its enduring impact is contingent on how much is yet to be done on a structural level to address India's sweeping gender inequities, victim invisibility, sources, and symptoms that intersectionally exacerbate the endemic of violence against women.

 **Trigger Warning:** Some of the textual data, visual examples and images in this paper contain graphic depictions of domestic violence that some readers may find disturbing or traumatic. It is provided purely for research purposes, and for a deeper understanding of a key social injustice that needs our attention. Nonetheless, reader discretion and care are recommended.

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Keywords: Domestic Violence, Embodied Resistance, India, Instagram Activism, (In)visibility Politics, #LockDownMeinLockUp, Performed Connectivity

Introduction

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Our bodies, as sites of acceptance and resistance, have taken on new afflictions in these trying times. For women violated by physical, emotional, verbal, and other forms of abuse, the viral COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions on space, time, and mobility has proven even more oppressive. Domestic violence (DV) is globally rampant. Yet, its forms, forces, incidences, and interventions are rooted in local power relations and unique cultural practices and so should their interventions and representations be. In India, COVID-19 has worsened the conditions of women who remain trapped at home with abusive partners and/or families.

A comparison of two years of government data on the frequency of violence against women (VAW) in India, from January 2018 to the lockdown period ending in May 2020, confirms that “domestic violence complaints have increased 0.47 standard deviation² (131%) in May 2020, in districts with the strictest lockdown rules” (Ravindran & Shah, 2020). Traditional media coverage has also prioritized health-related, economic, and political implications of the coronavirus, while little notice has been given to its impact on Indian women and their daily and intersectional oppressions, a reality neglected in favor of other pandemic urgencies.

To fill the gaps left by Indian media and broken social systems that are unable to address the heightened oppression women are facing during the pandemic, we need braver publics and alternate platforms to advocate and intervene. One way to achieve that is (I) by turning to nonprofit organizations that support a social cause, (II) rallying the support of influential people to give it more visibility and credence, and (III) mobilizing a campaign on social media using textual and visual identifiers that can turn it into a hashtivism with an extensive reach. Hashtivism or hashtag activism refers to high quantities of social media posts that are linked to a “hashtagged word, phrase or sentence with a social or political claim” (Yang, 2016, p. 13). One such hashtivism is #LockDownMeinLockUp, a compelling case study where an Indian nonprofit, Instagram, and celebrity influencers united around selfies and a shared hashtag to call out the violence many women were facing during India’s 2020 lockdown.

Drawing on the #LockDownMeinLockUp visual campaign against DV, this paper conceptually leverages embodied resistance, performed connectivity, and in/visibility politics (Ferreday, 2017; Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Raji, 2017) to explore how gender, body, power, affect, celebrity, performance, and injustice are framed by digital media in the context of an unprecedented global health crisis. An inductive thematic analysis of 1,624 Instagram images related to the 2020 hashtivism, its celebrity selfies, and digital posters reveal four themes relating to representations of and interventions against DV on Indian women during the pandemic, including: (1) names, stories, and victim visibility, (2) violence visuals, (3) celebrity selfie-resistance, and (4) action, connection, and transformation. The significance of this thematic analysis is twofold: First, it will help to assess the impact of influencer-led visual and digital activisms against DV, particularly in the context of national health crises and gender injustices in the global south. Second, the purpose of this qualitative study is to contribute to the critical body

of intersectional research and case study-based pedagogy in areas of digital communication, social justice, and gender studies.

Literature Review

COVID-19 and Gender-Based Violence in India

India's *Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005* defines DV as "any act of commission or omission or conduct resulting in physical, verbal, emotional, sexual and economic abuse," and thereafter lists the distinct types of violence and abusive behaviors it comprises (Government of India, 2005; Vora et al., 2020). Since March 2020, the COVID-19 lockdown in India has had a tremendous impact on women. In many cases, their bodies, minds, labor, and domiciles have been rendered sites of patriarchal and capitalistic exploitation. Research reveals the exacerbation of gender-based violence (GBV) during times of crises, "precipitated through multiple, interdependent causes like stress due to physical confinement, economic disruption, slowed down businesses, possible unemployment, scarcity of basic provisions, [and] limited social support" (Vora et al., 2020; Gearhart et al., 2018).

Gendered tropes including men as breadwinners and women as "household managers," appended by lockdown realities such as work alienation, school withdrawals, digital divides, doubling up of second-shift duties, and halted spatiotemporal mobilities for cohabiting units (mostly in small spaces, and often in joint families that include extended members) have in many cases resulted in men asserting "their supremacy by abusing the women who are under their authority...[and this] is likely to become more frequent in the lockdown period because they are in their houses now and are mostly unoccupied" (Bhateja, 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Mishra, 2020).

Gender roles in India have long rested on the masculinization of the world and the feminization of home. The kitchen functions as the "largest scattered and ultra-robust informal sector," dependent on the unpaid labor of female "de facto caregivers." India's pandemic-prompted locked-in living, often without domestic help and reduced economic support, has increased women's workload and risk factors for DV (Mishra, 2020; Agarwal & Sharma, 2020; EPW Engage, 2020; Vora et al., 2020; Mathews, 2020). Such spatial politics come with patriarchal dismissals of female labor and the social and media-lauded "normalization of the 'clueless man,'" who is labeled as being "lost in the domestic space without a woman" (Shaji, 2020; Mishra, 2020). When men do engage in housework, like boiling water, dusting, or ironing, their labor is mostly acknowledged, pitied, or even humored as that of the self-sufficient, poor, or clueless man, and it is often celebrated by Indian media and Bollywood. This toxic sexism is so entrenched in our private and public spaces, as well as in our cultural and media ideologies, that in situations where a national health crisis compounds gender disparity, its accountability and (invisible) labor lies squarely on the "perpetually tired bodies and minds of such women" (Shaji, 2020).

Sushmita Dev, past President of the *All India Mahila (Women's) Congress*², argues that the loss of economic agency due to the lockdown has had dire consequences for India's marginalized female population. She regrets that "In absence of a gendered-approach in handling the crisis, nobody is thinking about the women," who despite comprising 65% of the unorganized

²The *All India Mahila (Women's) Congress* (AIMC) is the women's section of the Indian National Congress (INC) Party, one of the two prime political parties in India. The AIMC's main function is to appoint women as card-holding state representatives, for securing votes, rallying, advocating women's issues in social, political and economic sectors, as well as to act "as a mechanism of mobilizing women by constituting 'women's organizations' under the umbrella and control of the [Congress] party" (Rai & Spary, 2019, p. 113; Gull & Shafi, 2014).

economic sector will lose their jobs and access to social and public mobility. To this, Dev adds the “double whammy” of “unpaid care work” borne solely by women at home, while social worker Kirthi Jayakumar observes how at this time many senior Indian women are facing abuse in addition to being “immunocompromised, [meaning] getting out of the house is not an option at all” (Agarwal & Sharma, 2020). The pandemic’s toll on access to “sexual, reproductive and maternal” healthcare has proved extensive, particularly for women marginalized by poverty and DV, including causing limited/no access to “contraception, safe abortion and medication” (Mathews, 2020). Women are more susceptible to health service inadequacies and illnesses brought on by COVID-19, considering they comprise 70% of frontline healthcare workers such as “nurses and primary care providers in the hospitals” (Agarwal & Sharma, 2020).

Neglectful abuse tactics like “loss of financial independence along with control of finances” and the escalation of psychological abuse during COVID-19 resulting in “diminished community support, disconnection from social networks and inability to seek temporary refuge from ‘outside spaces’ or have access to ‘private spaces,’” have put many women at higher risk of mental health problems (Mathews, 2020). For abused women, these symptoms often manifest as self-silencing, blame-internalization, stigma-induced guilt, “anger, humiliation, and fear...worthlessness and helplessness,” and in extreme cases, *trauma bonding*, where women forgive, trivialize, and do not report the violence they experience as they “learn to associate love with abuse” (Mathews, 2020). Possibly the biggest problem that renders a very public and visible crime invisible is underreporting (Chattopadhyay & Jacob, 2019; Bhateja, 2020).

Users of social and digital media have recently doubled their efforts to create awareness and push for GBV interventions as part of India’s COVID-19 action steps. For instance, many features published during the lockdown in the digital media platform *Feminism in India*, suggest systemic mediations to address DV, including the necessity to represent women in “economic planning, policy, decision-making, and emergency response planning” (Mathews, 2020), the need for courts to rethink crises policies related to COVID-19, and the demand for Indian media to create, share, and initiate gender-empowering content and action (Bhateja, 2020; Mishra, 2020). #LockDownMeinLockup, the case study explored in this paper, is one such digital intervention that was launched during India’s stay-at-home mandate and was co-opted as a larger hashtivism on Instagram to address peri-pandemic escalations of DV.

Hashtivism, Instagram, and Selfie Activism

The rise in DV cases during India's COVID-19 lockdown resulted in very high call volumes reporting these incidents to helplines of nonprofits, NGOs, and safe houses. One such NGO is SNEHA, a nonprofit based in Mumbai that has worked to advocate against GBV “for the last 20 years and was finding it difficult to help everyone who was reaching out because of its limited resources...[and] needed more funds to help victims,” who were cohabiting with their abusers during the viral lockdown (Siriti Creative, 2021). With the help of a digital media agency, SNEHA created and started the #LockDownMeinLockUp campaign in May 2020 to promote fundraising and to give a face and “a voice to SNEHA’s victims [clients/survivors] by letting Indian celebrities and others on social media adopt a name from a list of names shared on the SNEHA Instagram page” (Siriti Creative, 2021).

The last decade has seen many social changes being rallied by hashtags that carry the essence of the movement in its label, including prominent ones like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter. Some mobilize enough affective agency to succeed and make a change, while others may lose focus or become inauthentic (Williams et al., 2019; Papacharissi & Oliveira,

2012). In either case, the openness and emotional urgency of hashtag activism or hashtivism are enough to shake up the system and “push political discourses to be more inclusive and intersectional” (Jackson, 2016; Williams et al., 2019). Further, the architectural affordances and organic sociality of Twitter and Instagram make allowances for “a form of crowdsourced-elitism,” where even influencers become common and accessible to digital publics via earned media like retweets, shares, selfies, Instastories, AR filters, images, and more (Jackson & Welles, 2015, p. 935; Williams et al., 2019).

The power of Instagram is visual and mobile urgency. With more than 800 million users as of 2020, Instagram’s popularity “emanates from everyday social needs of sharing experiences and ideas of who we are in a visual form and in real time” and signals a mobile and ocular shift in the ways we communicate (Ekman & Widholm, 2017, p. 66). One can post an image, video, or selfie on Instagram with a visual tone so engaging and subjective that a lot can be said with or without the use of accompanying text. If (or when) affixed with a social narrative and meaningful hashtag, these images can convey a range of emotions and likely generate enough affect to start or carry a movement. And of course, in a digital world, what can be more imbued with visual subjectivity than selfies? Selfies shared on Instagram are materially intrinsic to the “‘platform vernacular’ of the photo-sharing app,” and are capable of producing “‘performative assemblages’ that are simultaneously embodied and mediated experiences” (Gibbs et al. 2015, as cited in Nunes, 2017, p. 112). The visual politics of selfies straddle between the narcissistic mundane to the “representational politic...about who has the ability to represent themselves and who is always represented by others, and the material effects of such representational violence” (Brager, 2017, p. 162)—a framework that I believe is key to understanding the “self-and-other” representational politics of celebrity selfie-cultures that can either problematize or help politicize social ills like DV.

Performed Connectivity, (In)Visibility Politics, and Embodied Resistance

Ekman and Widholm (2017) describe selfies as symbols of performed connectivity that exemplify contemporary digital communication, and they describe Instagram as “a significant resource for the production and cultivation of identity and fandom in the digital era” (p. 66). They draw on Turner’s (1986) idea of the public performance of identities that is framed by its relational “symbols, codes and broader social structures,” and connect it to the subjective and connective function that selfies perform within digital spaces (Ekman & Widholm, 2017). Research on performed connectivity and Instagram activism in the global south suggests that using the “Selfie as a photographic practice [also] gives visibility to previously invisible female citizens and reifies their claims to civic identity” (Aziz, 2017, p. 27). On the other hand, selfie activism among or for the marginalized can be challenging, since “for many, the visibility ingrained in the genre of the selfie is neither always available nor desirable, and claiming it can have dire consequences” (Kuntsman, 2017, p. 17; Vega, 2017; Raji, 2017).

Yet, this very body of research reveals the visual promise of selfies as powerful objects of embodiment. The “to-be-looked-at-ness” quality of selfies can thus be “moving in that they literally move, circulating virally in a culture that produces victim-survivor experience as both ‘unspeakable’ and ‘spoken for’” (Ferreday, 2017, p. 127). Stories of GBV and sexual trauma survivors have historically been censored in public spaces and their voices drowned out in favor of heteropatriarchal excuses. One way to challenge this oppressive quieting has been to visually embody “‘breaking the silence’ in both public and private contexts” and in varied forms and spaces of resistance (Ferreday, 2017, p. 131). Whether the visual embodiment of resistance in selfie

activism can create enough disruptions to politicize visibility and mobilize change in historically urgent and culturally unique contexts of social injustice and advocacy will likely depend on who the actor is, what power they have, who is being represented, and how authentic or affective their performance of representation is.

To evaluate if and how emergent themes of gender, body, power, affect, celebrity, performance, and injustice related to the rise of GBV during India's COVID-19 lockdown embody or make in/visible the #LockDownMeinLockUp visual mo[ve]ment on Instagram, the study addresses the following research question: How has the pandemic's impact on domestic violence against Indian women been visually represented by the #LockDownMeinLockUp hashtivism?

Method, Analysis, and Challenges

Instagram gives researchers the tools and content to examine how digital publics essentially “document elements of their everyday lives, in this case in a predominately visual context, and how these are presented online” (Highfield & Leaver, 2015; Rettberg, 2014). A standard method used for conducting qualitative and quantitative pilot research on platforms like Instagram and Twitter is to sample archived data from their “Search” functions or APIs by curating content using hashtags or key terms (Highfield & Leaver, 2015). The data used for this inductive thematic analysis comprises 1,624 images (selfies, digital graphics, videos) related to the #LockDownMeinLockUp hashtag activism. These images were posted on Instagram between May 11, 2020 and December 16, 2020. The sample timeframe coincides with the day the digital campaign was launched on Instagram by the Mumbai-based NGO, SNEHA (@snehamumbai_official), to when the last post of 2020 related to the campaign and its social cause was floated.

The data is a purposive sample of Instagram content that was gathered from Instagram's “Search” widget, using the hashtag #LockDownMeinLockUp. The data was further filtered to include (I) only visual content that contained the hashtag in the accompanying image, text, or caption, and that (II) addressed the issue of DV against Indian women during the pandemic. The non-random method of purposive sampling has been selected to fit the aim of this pilot qualitative study and its exploratory research question. The aim of this study is not to quantify the frequency of findings within the dataset, but to delve into an inductive thematic analysis of the forms and forces that exacerbated or mitigated VAW amidst India's COVID-19 lockdown.

Inductive thematic analysis is a qualitative method of curating and coding social and cultural data. In communication and media research, this method especially enables the researcher to take “a closer look at implicit meanings that are socially created and mediated” (Mukherjee, 2013, p. 108; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Mukherjee, 2015; Mukherjee & Dexter, 2020). To support the data collection method and critical research rationale, this study followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage thematic analysis process. The primary stage involved familiarization or a close examination of the dataset comprising 1,624 Instagram images, published within the 8 months that coincided with the campaign's relevance during the first year of the pandemic. The second and third stages led to coding each image as a unit of analysis and generating both semantic (explicit) and latent (implicit) codes or themes relating to DV against Indian women during the lockdown and the significance of the #LockDownMeinLockUp Instagram campaign (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boyatzis, 1998). The next stage involved reviewing, refining, and recoding key themes that may have been “missed in earlier coding stages” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). The last two steps included naming and defining the themes in agreement with which “aspect of the data each theme

captures” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 94-95), and then reporting the findings and data examples to address the research question and theoretical framework.

It is worth mentioning that several Instagram images in the dataset containing the hashtag were co-opted by Instagrammers and NPOs not affiliated with the Indian NGO SNEHA or their original campaign, but who also used the #LockDownMeinLockUp hashtag to support action against the rise of DV during India’s COVID-19 lockdown. While this cooption is proof of the viral impact of this campaign and its rallying hashtag, it also raises potential “questions about authorship and intentionality when it comes to tags and Instagram content” (Highfield & Leaver, 2014). In other words, one of the challenges of this study was to judge if or how using a unique hashtag in a post that is created by someone else may deflect attention away from the intended objective, while also running the risk of becoming “irrelevant or contradictory to the media content, including spam comments” (Highfield & Leaver, 2014). The other methodological challenge in curating a small sample of visual data from Instagram was to intentionally filter out user comments to the original Instagram posts to make the pilot study more manageable. This may have shortchanged the researcher’s assessment of how relevant or popular the posts were among other digital users. In future iterations of this study, such challenges can be mitigated by conducting a mixed-method analysis of a big sample of Instagram data and triangulating the inductive thematic analysis with a quantitative content analysis of visuals containing the hashtag #LockDownMeinLockUp in both original and coopted Instagram posts.

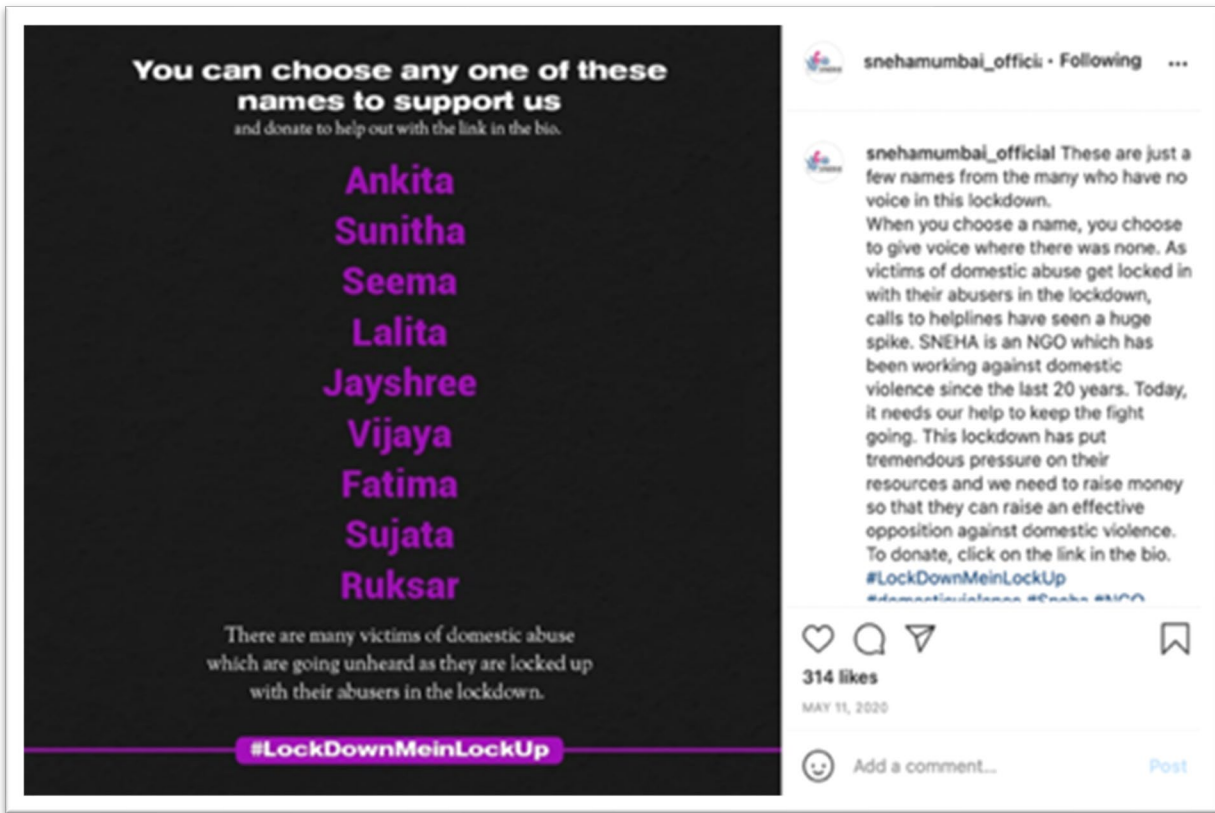
Findings

An inductive thematic analysis of the #LockDownMeinLockUp hashtivism, its celebrity selfies and campaign graphics and videos, reveal four themes relating to representations of, and interventions against, DV on Indian women during the pandemic, including (1) names, stories, and victim visibility; (2) violence visuals; (3) celebrity selfie-resistance; and (4) action, connection, and transformation.

Names, Stories, and Victim Visibility

This theme refers to Instagram posts containing images and text created for SNEHA’s #LockDownMeinLockUp campaign. It features names of DV survivors (changed to ensure privacy and anonymity) and their stories of violence. It also features graphic illustrations containing incidents, filters, hashtags, powerful poems, and prose that illustrate the plight of women trapped within domestic spaces with their abusers during India’s viral lockdown. To initiate #LockDownMeinLockUp, create awareness of rising DV cases amidst the pandemic, and solicit funds in support of their cause, SNEHA and the digital company that helped it create the Instagram campaign posted several graphics in solid and bold colors, including one that lists the names of nine women in large font (DV victims or survivors) (see Figure 1).

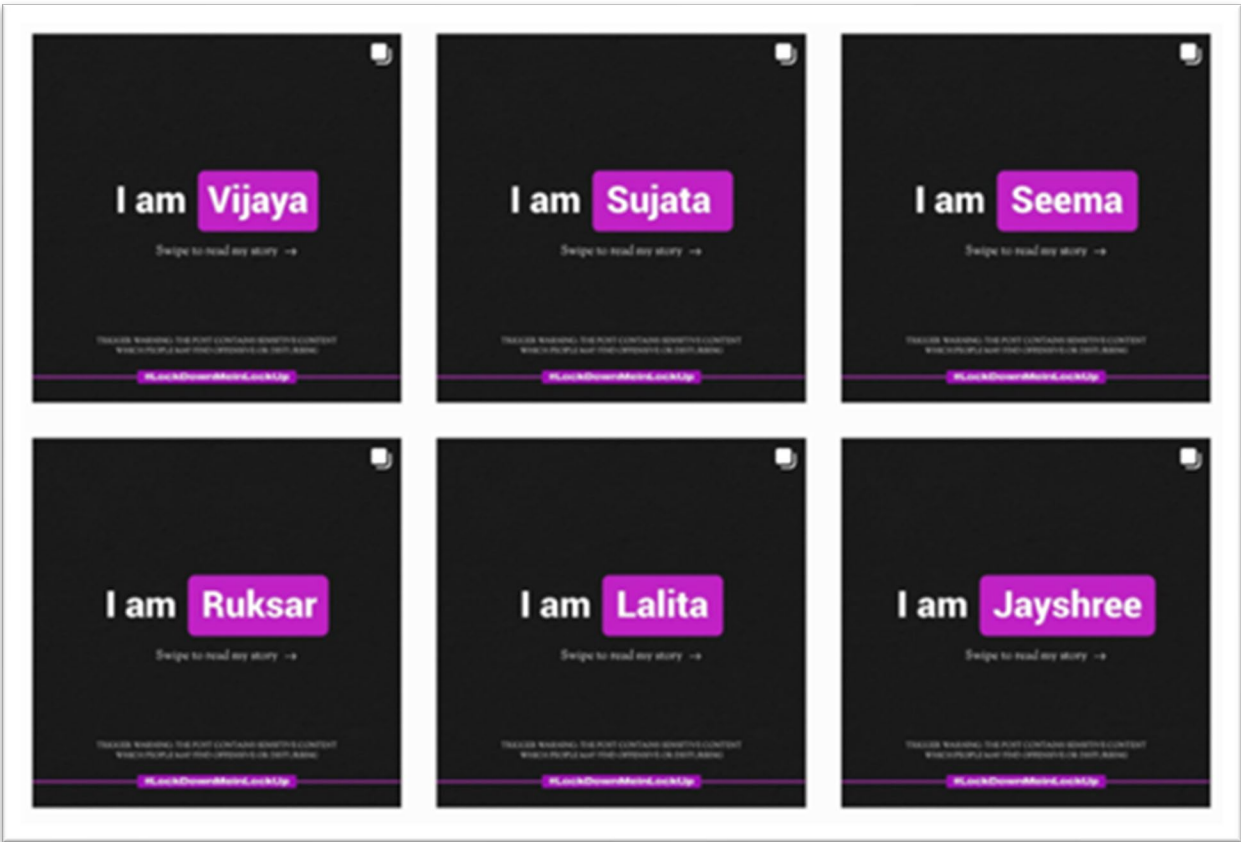
Figure 1



The graphic listing names of female victims also acts as a space to give them a face, a voice, and an identity, which is significant within a cultural context where crimes like DV have traditionally been kept private, underreported, and often legally censured. The digital campaign's appeal that "When you choose a name, you choose to give voice where there was none," along with a reminder of their philanthropic mission that "needs our help to keep the fight going...to raise money so that they can raise an effective opposition against domestic violence" (Instagram, 2020), not only reveals how important it is to pay attention to social injustices that have worsened during the pandemic, but also underscores India's cultures of toxic misogyny and victim shaming that have traditionally normalized VAW (Mathews, 2020; Mukherjee, 2015).

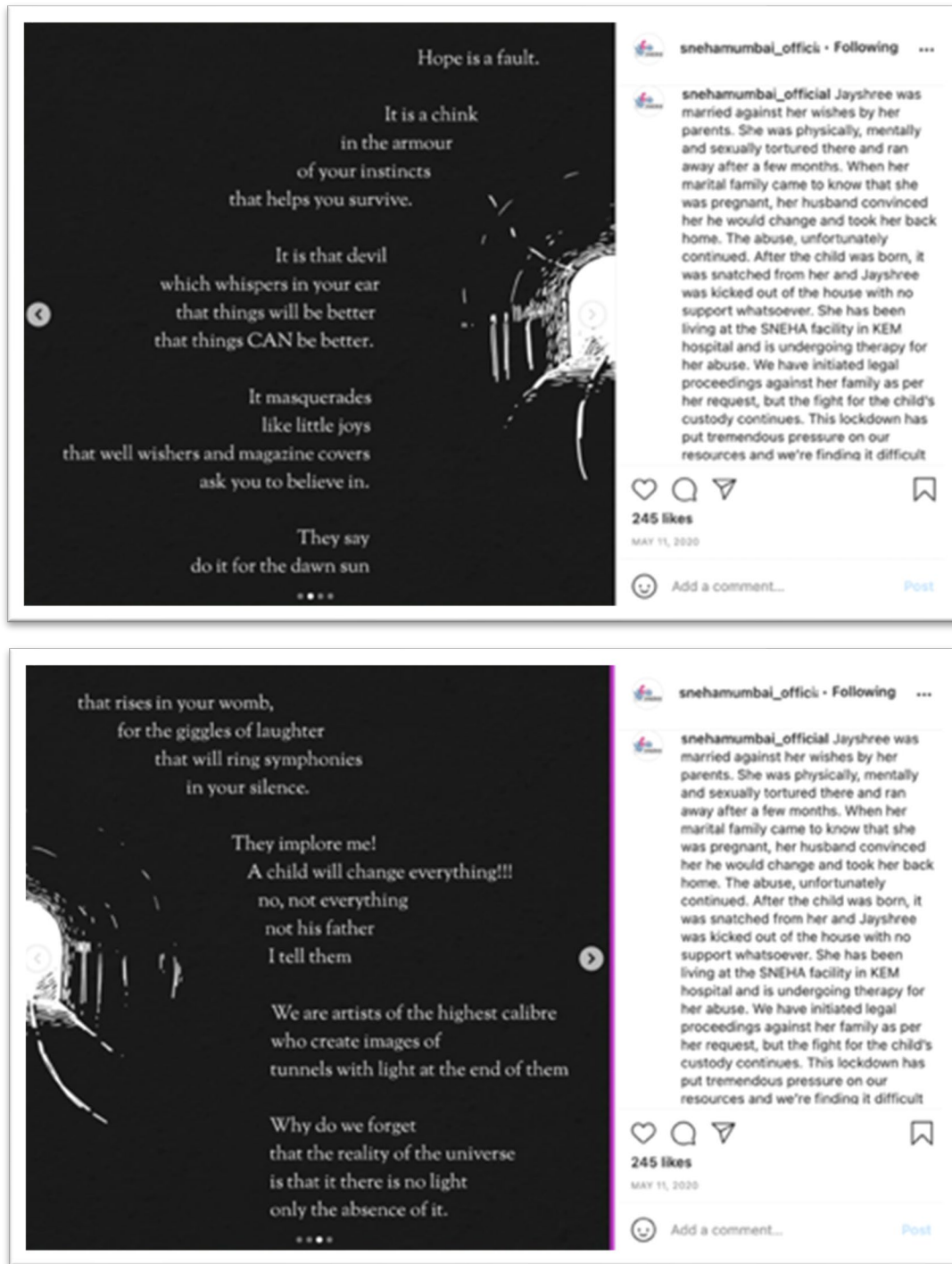
Then there are the #LockDownMeinLockUp Instagram images containing stories of violence that women experienced—each one horrific and heartbreaking. Several campaign graphics isolated a name from their list of victims' names and featured it in large text with the words, "I am [NAME]" (Instagram, 2020), followed by the woman's name (DV survivor) and action-text prompting Instagrammers to swipe right to read her story. This came with a trigger warning about the disturbing nature of images showing her experiences of abuse (see Figure 2).

Figure 2



The nine names and stories created and curated by the Instagram campaign function as a microcosm of the multiple types of domestic abuse that hundreds of thousands of Indian women face regularly. As the stories suggest, the violence that these women endure ranges from them being “brutally abused and forced into having sex with relatives and strangers by her husband for money,” to a case where a woman “was rescued from her captivity by her brothers...She had gone 6 days without food or water,” to another woman’s “husband [who] was under severe stress because of a financial situation, the frustration of which would come out on his wife” (Instagram, 2020). One of the nine stories illustrated via a powerful poem how a married woman “was physically, mentally and sexually tortured and ran away after a few months...[and] she was pregnant” (see Figure 3). Another story details how a woman “was physically and mentally abused by her marital family who have since disappeared with all of [her] belongings and money,” and another where a woman “was facing incessant violence from her alcoholic husband in the form of marital rape and physical beatings” (Instagram, 2020).

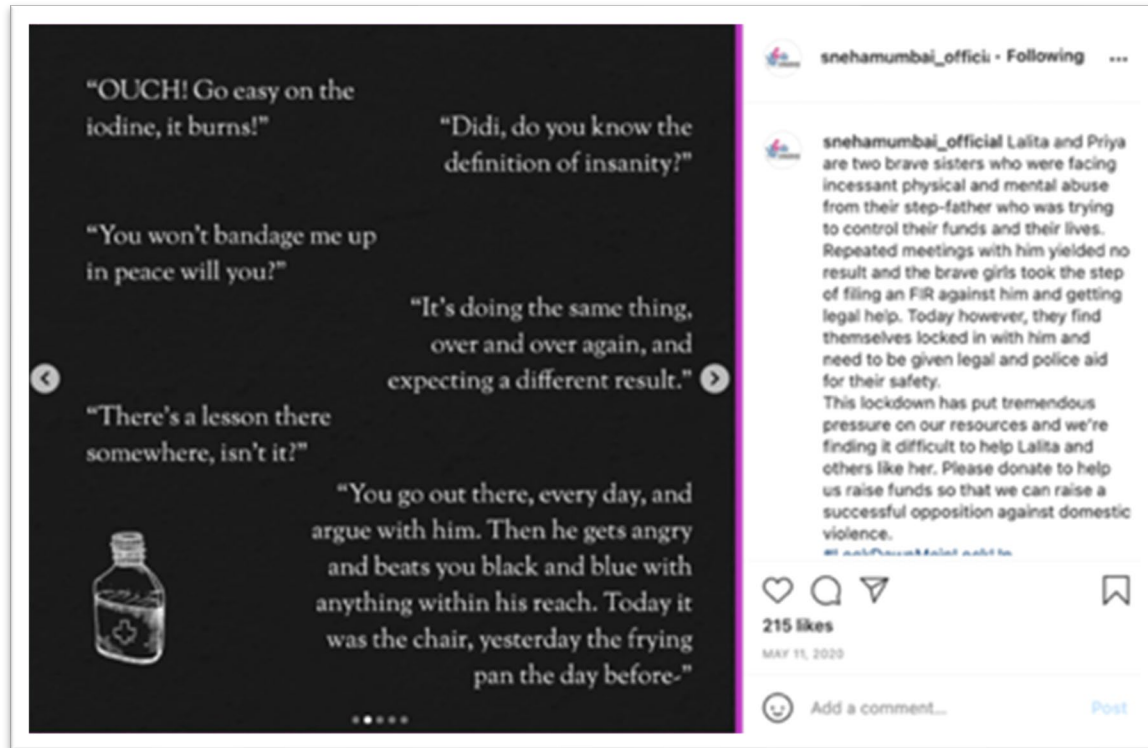
Figure 3



Stories of non-marital domestic violence were also presented via the campaign, including one of “two brave sisters who were facing incessant physical and mental abuse from their step-father who was trying to control their funds and their lives” (see Figure 4) and of a mentally ill woman who was being abused by her parents. She was later helped by a neighbor and SNEHA,

who diagnosed her schizophrenia, and she now “requires periodic psychiatric counseling and medical intervention, while her parents need regular counseling to become the loving caregivers she needs” (Instagram, 2020).

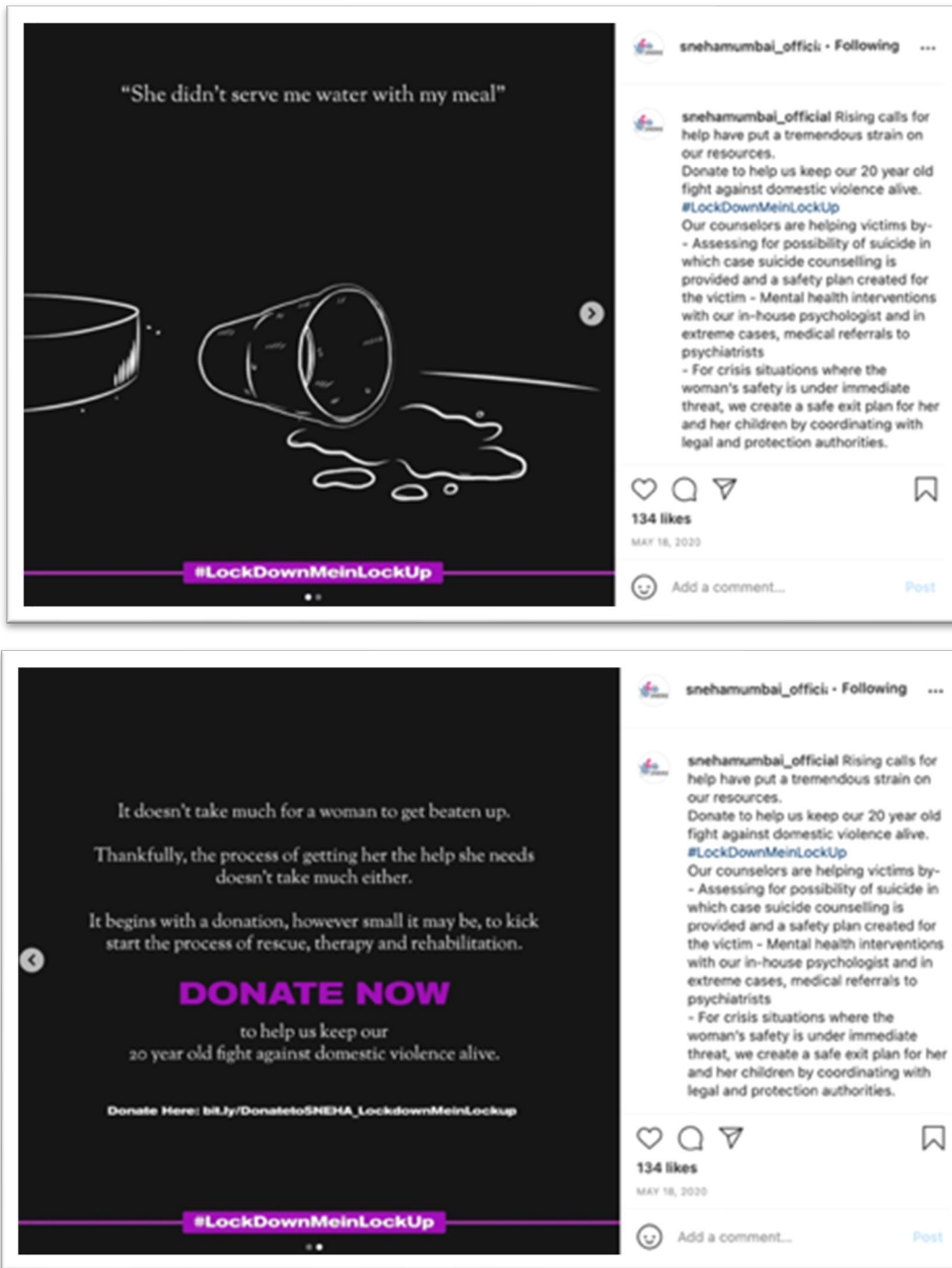
Figure 4



The Instagram campaign was used to request help for extreme cases of DV, where women were finding it very hard to survive within or leave their abusive situations because of the lockdown. The range of visual appeals the NGO used to seek help included victims’ pandemic-related predicaments, such as being “locked-in with someone who she has filed an FIR³ against and is scared for her life,” to noting that “Today we are helping her with legal guidance and documentation, but this process has slowed down after the lockdown began” (Instagram, 2020). This theme was also present on Instagram as stark graphics and single quotes, likely from abusers, which were later recalled by victims or reported. They included reasons for DV infliction such as, “She overslept,” or “She dared to wear lipstick” (see Figure 5). These graphics were accompanied by awareness-creation slogans from the #LockDownMeinLockUp campaign, such as, “It doesn’t take much for a woman to get beaten up,” along with SNEHA’s solutions, “that the process of getting her the help she needs doesn’t take much either. It begins with a donation, however small it may be to kick start the process of rescue, therapy and rehabilitation” (Instagram, 2020).

³ An FIR or First Information Report usually refers to “a complaint lodged with the police by the victim of a cognizable offense or by someone on his/her behalf.” In such “cognizable offense” cases, the police can start investigations and/or arrest alleged offenders without court-authorized warrants (<https://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/publications/police/fir.pdf>).

Figure 5



Violence Visuals

This theme includes DV-related Instagram images that can be said to have either organic or earned value. Organic value, or reach, refers to the number of people that an organization or individual can reach just by having their content freely posted and/or shared on social media by subscribers, followers, or others (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). The organic violence visuals in this

case comprise images and selfies of Instagrammers who voluntarily advocated for the hashtivism or used the hashtag #LockDownMeinLockUp and helped it go viral after being nominated by invested others. While many posts were not created by SNEHA's official campaign or the pilot influencers it petitioned, this form of viral outreach added to the organic media value of the campaign and posts were often "liked" by the campaign's creators. Few of these organic violence visuals, including selfies or photographic images of women's faces, were made to resemble physical battery or violence, using makeup and special cosmetic effects. Others were presented as short videos of anti-DV activism during India's pandemic (see Figure 6 and Figure 7). Although cosmetically enacted, such organic violence visuals and the spatial architecture of Instagram have the potential to embody resistance as a "powerful space of organization, testimony and support," wherein the power of performance, connection, and visibility "works together to insist on the way in which trauma is experienced as intimate and personal, as something that one carries around, but also to the collective and communal possibilities afforded by activism" (Ferreday, 2017, p. 133).

Figure 6

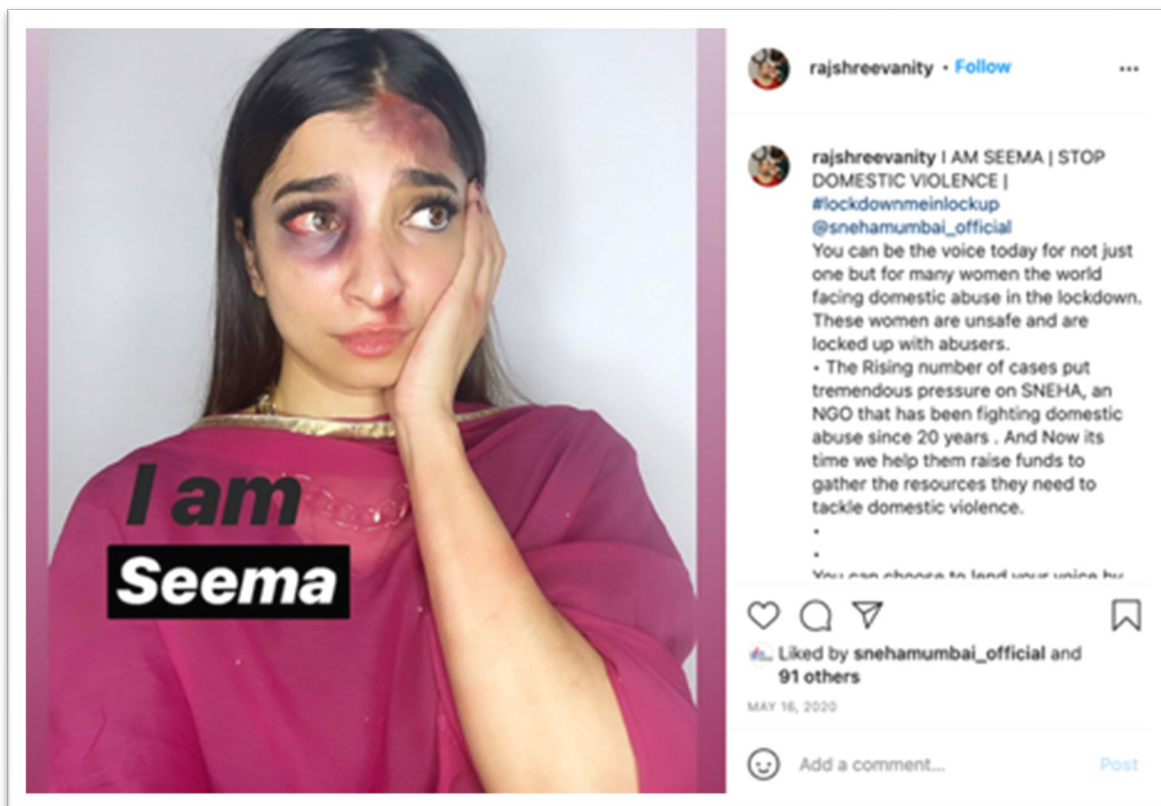
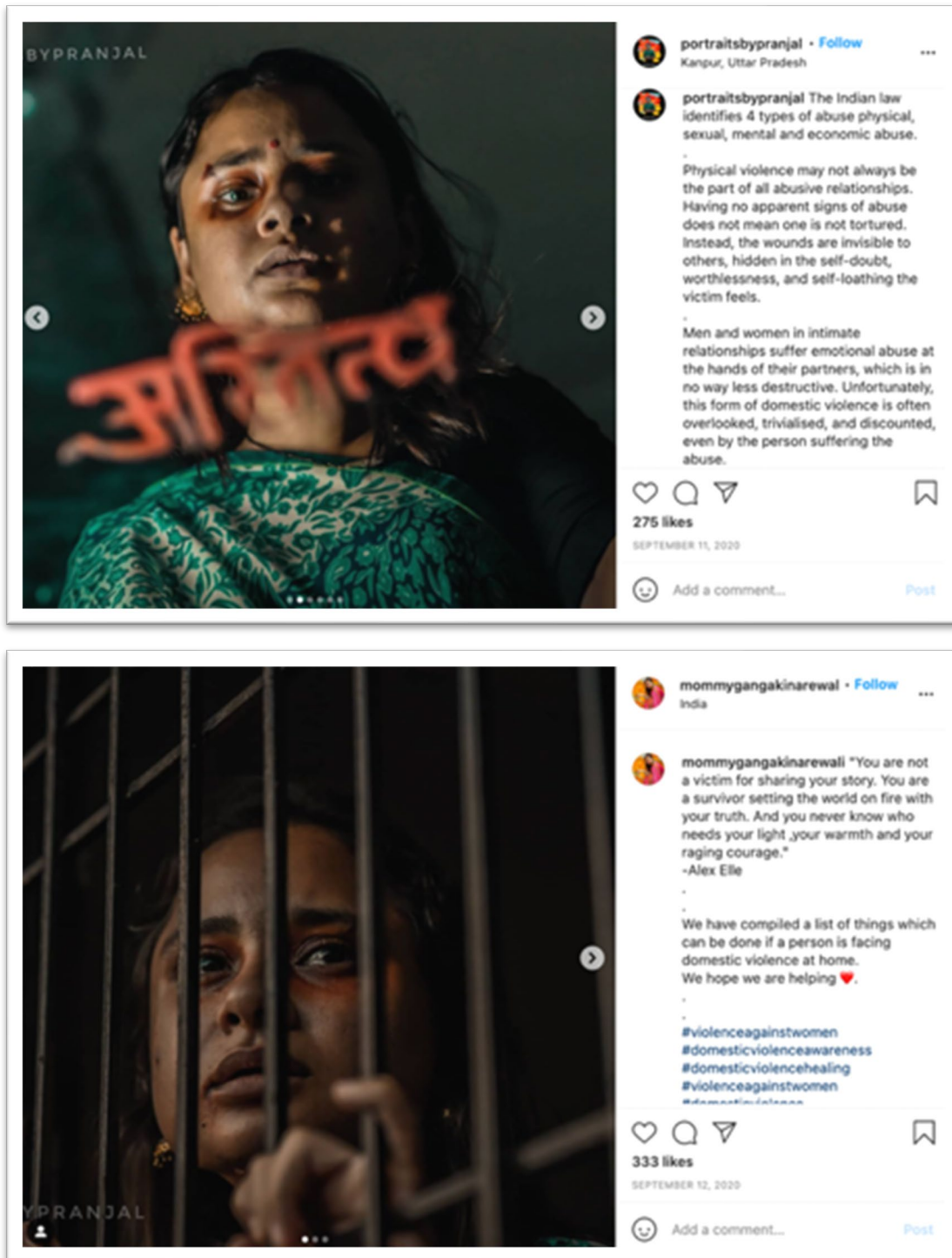


Figure 7



The earned violence visuals comprised powerful, “non-selfie” images created for the Instagram #LockDownMeinLockUp campaign by SNEHA, who partnered with the digital media team at Siriti (@sitirisphere). Earned value refers to the scope, significance, and influence of

endorsed content posted by an organization or individual that creates a positive impact on digital publics, who in turn make the content and their positive opinions viral (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). In this case, the earned posts included the dramatic use of photographic, animated, and custom pop art that informed digital publics about the types of violence being perpetrated on women. They also presented visual information on the different tools or weapons used to inflict physical and mental harm, including black and white images of cigarette butts, clothes hangers, cricket bats, etc. (see Figure 8). Some images provide statistics of DV during India's pandemic, which "in mid-April suggests an almost 100% increase in domestic violence during the lockdown period" as well as information about COVID-19-related immobility and greater at-risk factors for abused women who were locked-in with their abusers because of their "hesitance in reporting the crimes due to fear or inability to move away from the perpetrator" (Instagram, 2020) (see Figure 9).

Figure 8

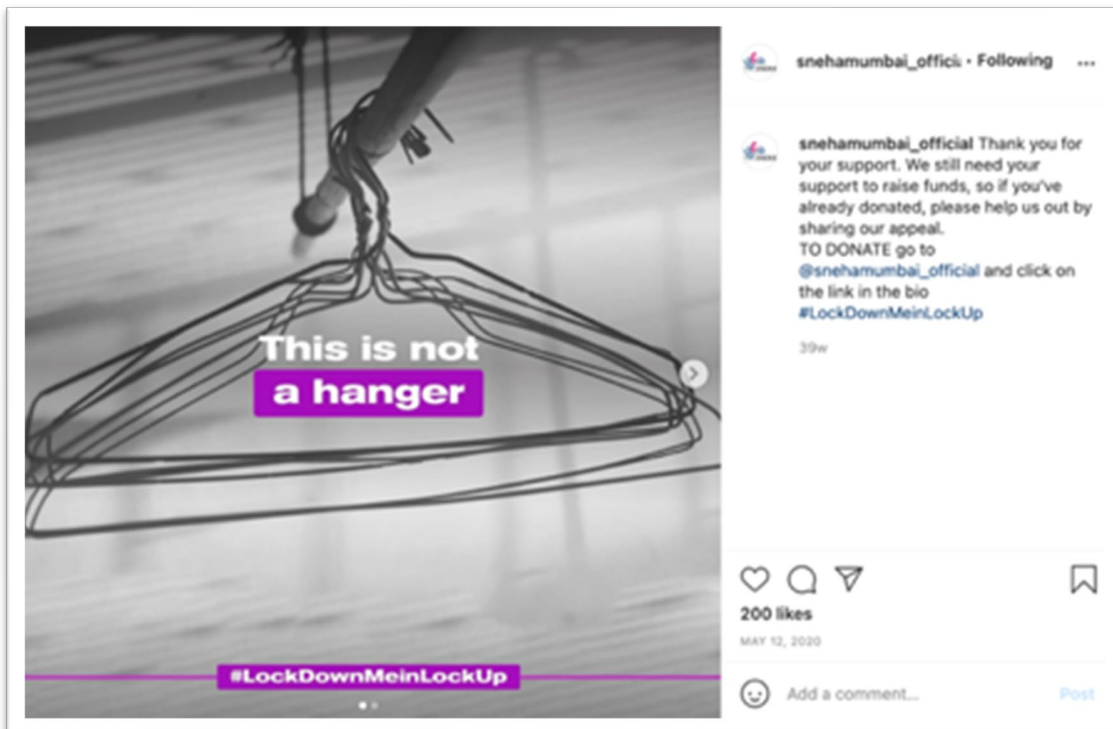
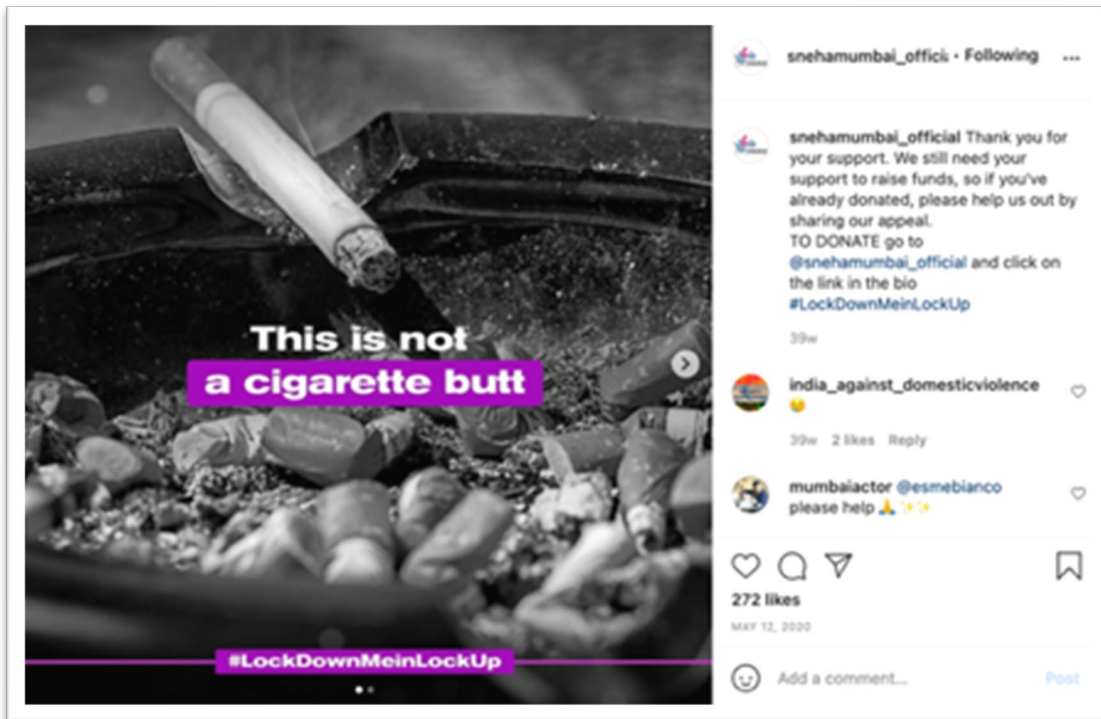
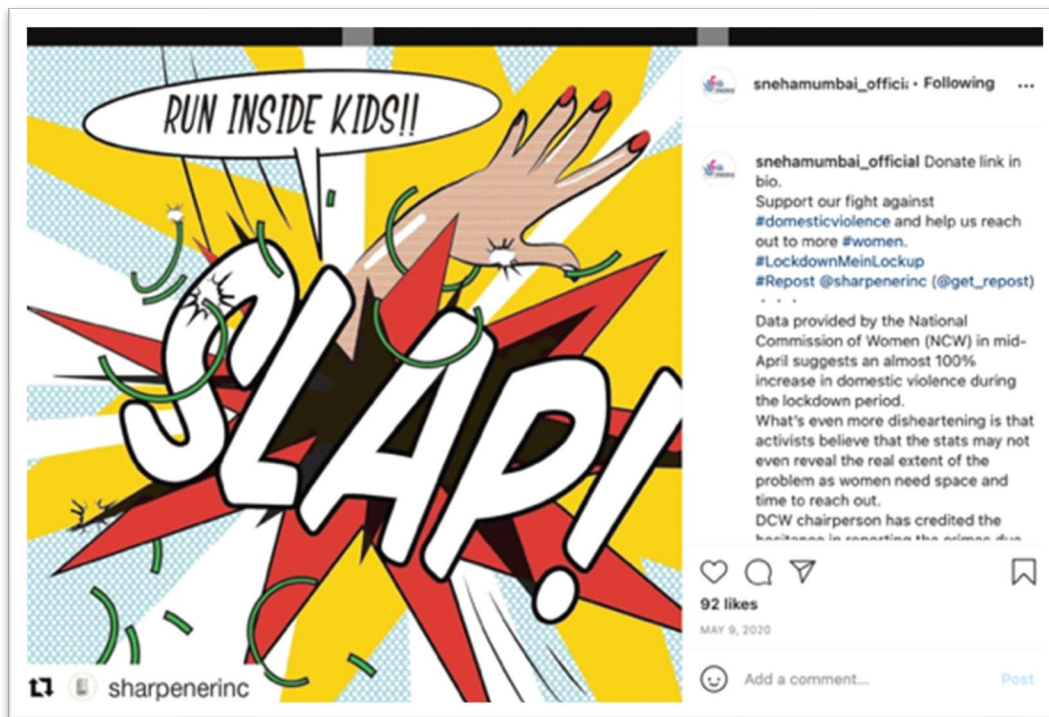


Figure 9



Celebrity Selfie-Resistance

This theme was predominant in the sample and is made up of two variations of celebrity-posted selfies that were widely shared to introduce interruptions and create resistance against VAW during India's stay-at-home mandate. It was presented on Instagram in direct and mediated ways. In the direct form, many celebrities endorsed #LockDownMeinLockUp using selfies and/or their own images as captured by others, and comprised Indian influencers across fields such as media, fashion, art, politics, business, etc. Below is an example of an Instagram petition that accompanied the campaign's celebrity-selfies.

I am her voice today and the voices of the many victims of domestic abuse which are going unheard as they are locked up with their abuser's [sic] in the lockdown. #Lockdownmeinlockup rising numbers of cases have put tremendous pressure on the resources of SNEHA, an NGO that has been fighting domestic violence for 20 years. They need to raise funds to raise resources to tackle domestic violence. You can choose to lend your voice by clicking on @snehamumbai_official, pick a name from their page, post an image with the name you've picked, and donate via the link in the bio. Thank you [IG HANDLE of NOMINATOR] for nominating me. I nominate [IG HANDLES of NOMINEES] to lend their voices and help SNEHA (Instagram, 2020).

Some famous faces and names associated with the campaign, along with the names and stories of the victims they embodied, included Bollywood celebrities like Bipasha Basu, Kalki

Koehlin, and Karishma Kapoor, media mogul Ekta Kapoor, TV personalities like Mandira Bedi and Shonali Nagrani, actor-politician Shabana Azmi, famed health professional Dr. Zirak Marker, celebrity stylist Ambika Pillai, and life coach Nipa Asharam.

The most direct form of celebrity selfie-resistance seemed to be led by the soft power of Bollywood, which for a large percentage of the Indian population holds as much social currency as other forms of institutional loyalty such as family, community, religion, traditions, etc. Research on digital engagement, fandom, and loyalty shows that followers like to follow trends, particularly when those trends are started and made popular by individuals who they have an affinity towards, as in this case Bollywood celebrities (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Functioning as affective connections in mobile contexts of visual representation, the “production and maintenance of sociability is fundamental to celebrity culture,” as we find in #LockDownMeinLockUp’s direct circulation and nominations of selfie-led celebrity advocacy on Instagram, while also leveraging social media’s affordances including, “performed intimacy, authenticity and access” (Ekman & Widholm, 2017).

Celebrity selfies were also used in mediated ways by SNEHA to push its official campaign. These reposted images contained variations of the text and disclaimer accompanying their influencer’s selfies, their names or Instagram handles, and their role in helping advocate against DV. Links to the NGO’s Instagram handle, donation site, campaign logo, client/victim-anonymity disclaimers, along with appeals to fundraise, often followed such posts. For instance, a celebrity selfie mediated by SNEHA for its official campaign recognizes Bollywood actor and model Diya Mirza’s (@diyamirzaofficial) pledge to support their cause, using, as part of their Instagram filter, the caption: “@diyamirzaofficial chose to give her voice to many victims of domestic violence by participating in our appeal to raise funds for the NGO SNEHA. Have you given yours yet?” (Instagram, 2020). For many reposts of celebrity-selfies, the NGO used variants of this caption, along with the #LockDownMeinLockUp Instagram hashtag, logo, and campaign filters (See Figure 11). The repeated use of the hashtag here, whose function it is “to connect the selfie to other selfies, as well as other textual and visual content on social platforms,” also functioned as an artifact of performed connectivity in both direct and mediated forms of celebrity selfie-resistance against the peri-pandemic rise in domestic violence (Mottahedeh, 2017, p. 61).

Figure 10

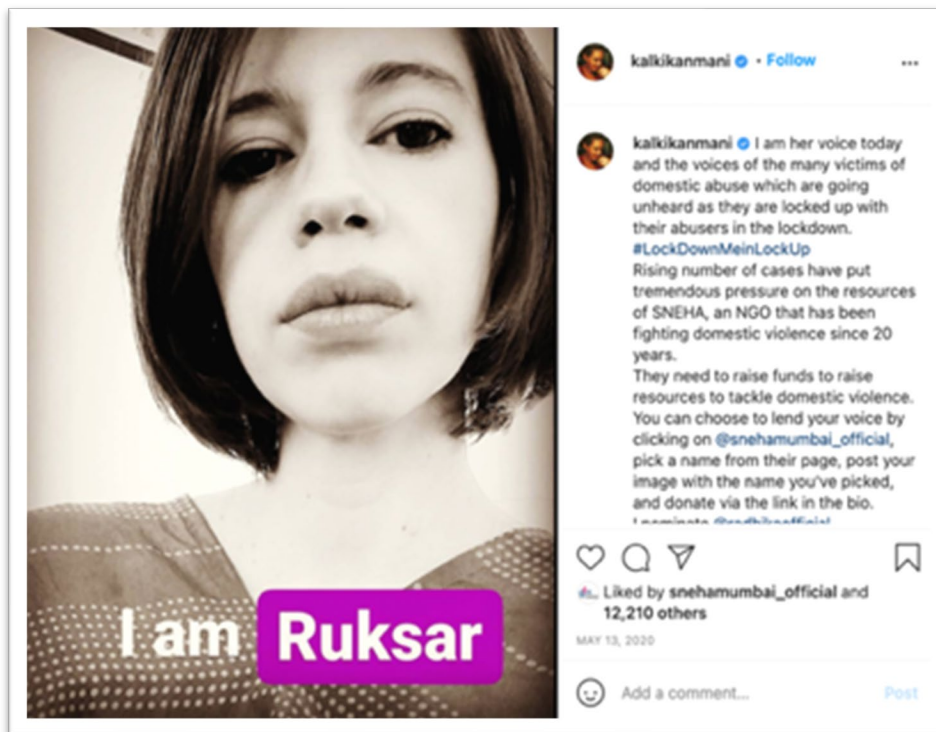
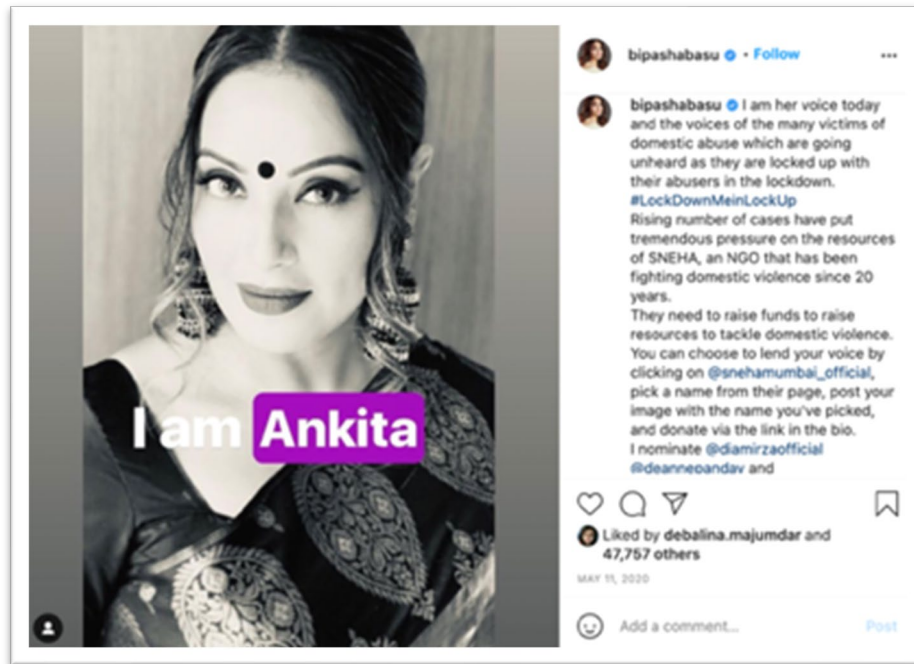
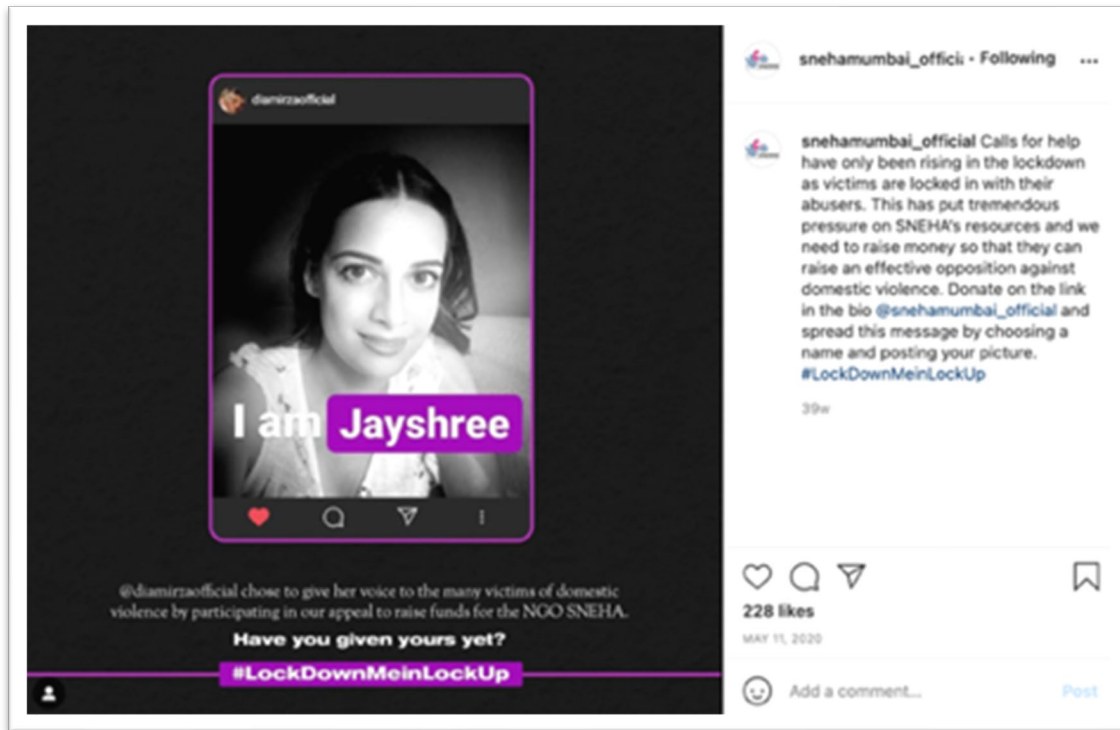


Figure 11

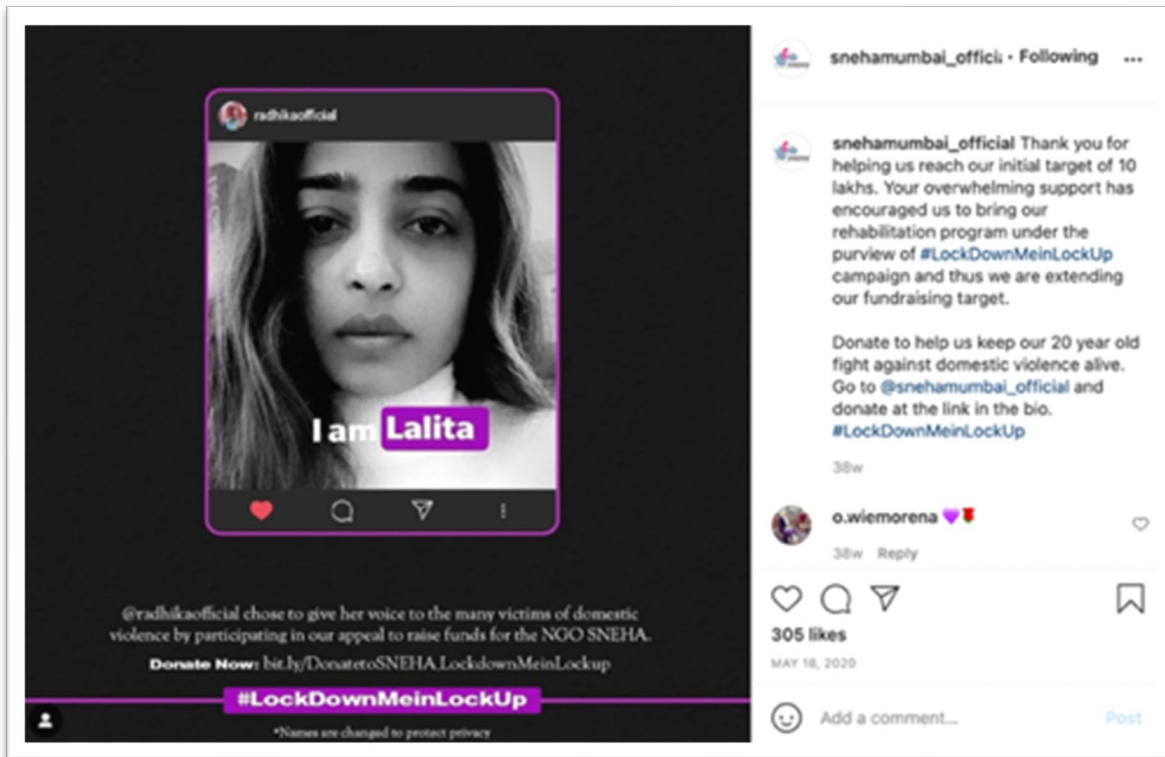


After the initial fundraising target was met, SNEHA and its official campaign continued reposting and mediating celebrity selfies that linked to the campaign’s Instagram handle, donation links, and appeals to help increase their fundraising goal. As an example, a “mediated” influencer selfie shared as part of SNEHA’s campaign outreach acknowledges Bollywood celebrity Radhika Apte’s (@radhikaofficial) commitment to their cause, accompanied by this appeal (See Figure 12).

Thank you for helping us reach our initial target of 10 lakhs. Your overwhelming support has encouraged us to bring our rehabilitation program under the purview of #LockDownMeinLockUp campaign and thus we are extending our fundraising target (Instagram, 2020).

One way to evaluate the role of celebrity selfie-resistance in the #LockDownMeinLockUp campaign is to recognize its material impact, which exceeded their fundraising target and brought their cause much visibility within a short time. The second way is to notice the campaign’s “premeditated managing of selfies on social media platforms” and to acknowledge its social influencers’ “capability to simultaneously appear as ‘one of us’ and as ‘special’” (Raji, 2017; Van Zoonen, 2005, p. 82).

Figure 12



Caution, of course, warrants that our present and saturated age of “social media celebrity culture[s]” can impose inauthentic performances of activism and superficial embodiments of resistance, suggesting that the “aesthetic of radicalness to one’s followers carries far more cache and glamour than actually doing the unglamorous toll of grassroots activism” (Raji, 2017, p. 155). That said, embodied affect inherent in activist selfies and their viral circulation, according to Ferreday (2017), often renders them visual sites of resistance, “making connections between those whose shared experience of trauma is [normally] privatized, individualized and made unspeakable...transformed into the basis of collective action and mutual support” (p. 133). For #LockDownMeinLockup, however digitally performed the embodiment of resistance against DV and the plight of abused women during the pandemic may seem, the sheer number of celebrities who endorsed and advocated against GBV using their selfies, platforms, privilege, and opinion leadership seems to have been enough to inspire digital publics to petition, donate, and get involved.

Action, Connection, and Transformation

Instagram images related to this theme included focused and co-opted calls to action, connecting digital publics, and advocating changes to ensure the safety and health of abused women during the COVID-19 lockdown. Focused visuals related to “action, connection and transformation” were primarily created and curated for the #LockDownMeinLockUp campaign on Instagram by the NGO @snehamumbai_official and their digital media partner @siritisphere.

Typical images illustrated action-steps meant for users to create and upload selfies and images using the #LockDownMeinLockUp filters and Instagram Story feature along with

suggested fonts, campaign colors, and the name of a victim/survivor from the list of names shared earlier by the NGO, including text-based appeals such as “Upload your picture and give a voice to the unheard victims of domestic violence who are locked in with their abusers in this lockdown...To donate, click on the link in the bio. #LockDownMeinLockUp #domesticviolence #Sneha #NGO #domesticviolenceawareness” (see Figure 13 and Figure 14). In prescribing action steps to turn personal into political affect, #LockDownMeinLockUp’s “acts of [selfie] citizenship” are functionally asking publics to perform resistance by visually embodying “the rage, sadness and trauma that may surface in a single moment...[to] draw attention to the actual experience of the vast body of citizens who are also already victim-survivors.” (Ferreday, 2017, p. 130; Kuntsman, 2017).

Figure 13

3 Easy steps to create your own Image

To create your Sneha support Image /Video use Instagram Story:

- 1 Use black and white (Tokyo) filter from Instagram default filters, by just swiping on the image
- 2 Use 'Classic' font to write. Highlight the name with purple color by clicking on 'A' on left top corner of your screen and by choosing the purple color from the color palette given below.
- 3 Save it & upload as a post

Jaysree

I am

#LockDownMeinLockUp

snehamumbai_official · Following ...

snehamumbai_official Upload your picture and give a voice to the unheard victims of domestic violence who are locked in with their abusers in this lockdown. #LockDownMeinLockUp is a campaign that aims to raise funds for the NGO SNEHA which has been working against domestic violence since the last 20 years and now needs our help to keep the fight going. This lockdown has put tremendous pressure on their resources and we need to raise money so that they can raise an effective opposition against domestic violence. To donate, click on the link in the bio. #LockDownMeinLockUp #domesticviolence #Sneha #NGO #domesticviolenceawareness

198 likes
MAY 11, 2020

Add a comment... Post

3 Easy steps to create your own Image

To create your Sneha support Image /Video use Instagram Story:

- 1 Use black and white (Tokyo) filter from Instagram default filters, by just swiping on the image
- 2 Use 'Classic' font to write. Highlight the name with purple color by clicking on 'A' on left top corner of your screen and by choosing the purple color from the color palette given below.
- 3 Save it & upload as a post

Ruksar

I am

#LockDownMeinLockUp

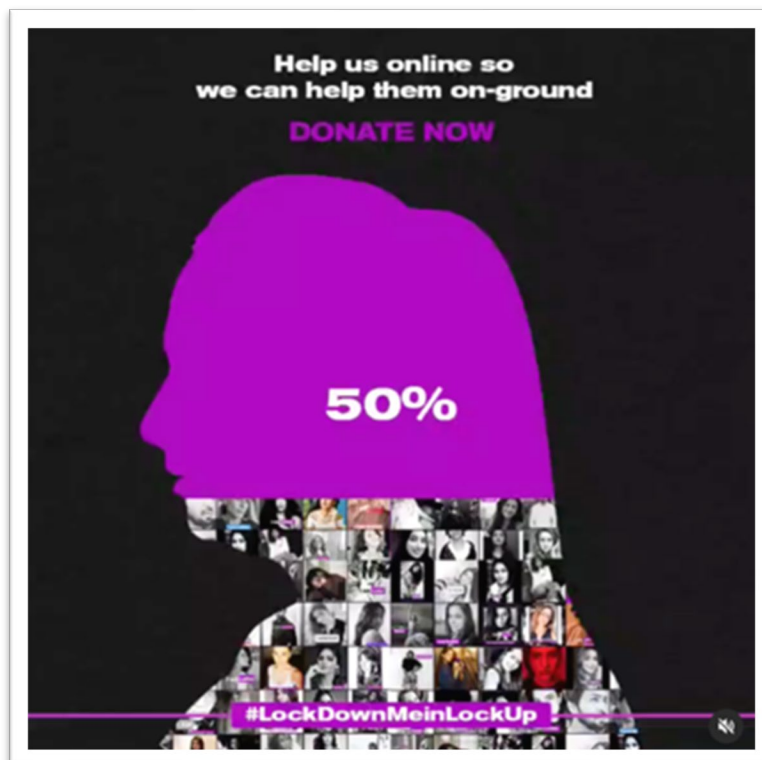
snehamumbai_official · Following ...

snehamumbai_official Upload your picture and give a voice to the unheard victims of domestic violence who are locked in with their abusers in this lockdown. #LockDownMeinLockUp is a campaign that aims to raise funds for the NGO SNEHA which has been working against domestic violence since the last 20 years and now needs our help to keep the fight going. This lockdown has put tremendous pressure on their resources and we need to raise money so that they can raise an effective opposition against domestic violence. To donate, click on the link in the bio. #LockDownMeinLockUp #domesticviolence #Sneha #NGO #domesticviolenceawareness

137 likes
MAY 11, 2020

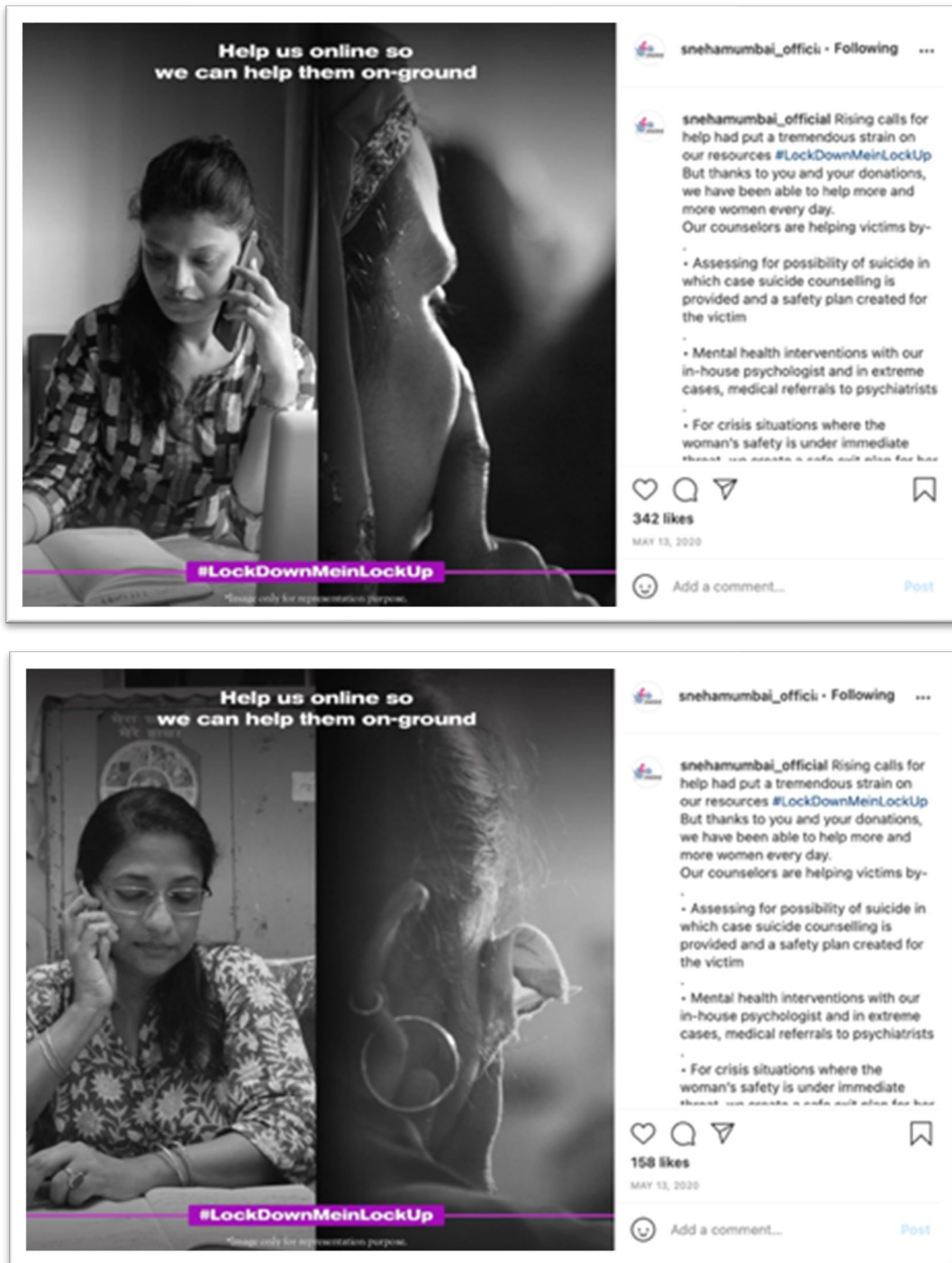
Add a comment... Post

Figure 14



Dramatic black and white photographs that juxtapose images of female DV survivors and interventionists within the same frame, in symbolic poses that suggest emotional desperation, sadness or help-seeking in the former case, and empathic listening and help-delivering nonverbals in the latter, comprised another category of focused visuals within this theme. It is curious, yet understandable, that in most images the faces of the “actor” or “authentic” survivors are not made visible from the front, but appear as over-the-shoulder profiles, with hands covering or resting on the face as if in tears, deep thought, or despair (See Figure 15). As Raji (2017) reminds us, embodied resistance using selfies and other corporeal visuals is not always about the “face or the body,” but rather “about the message that one is attempting to convey,” and, as in the case of #LockDownMeinLockUp and its focused resistance visuals, they are “even more powerful and politically subversive, for they point to the very surveillance, the very structural oppressions that are used to silence our critical interventions” (p. 158).

Figure 15



What made the hashtag #LockDownMeinLockUp more visible and viral was its digital cooption by several anti-DV advocates on Instagram. Most of these visuals were crafted and shared by other (not SNEHA or @siritisphere) Instagrammers, social organizations, and related media, including @indiayouthtalks, @2girlsinthecityblogs, and @india_against_domesticviolence. Their posts contained the official #LockDownMeinLockUp campaign hashtag, along with related others

like #breakthesilence, #ringthebellcampaign, #youarenotalone, and #stopdomesticviolence (Instagram, 2020). Many co-opted Instagram visuals comprised digital art and illustrated graphics, using ironic double-takes on pandemic-linked safety protocols, such as “It’s time to unmask ourselves and voice out against all forms of abuse,” “No lockdown for Domestic Violence,” and “Silence is License to Violence” (Instagram, 2020). Some made people aware of the legal coverage of the “Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005,” provided information about resources like helplines for women run by female police and local Indian NGOs, and raised awareness of the various personal and social reasons that DV goes unreported (see Figure 16 and Figure 17). Some resistance graphics reminded networked publics how widespread the endemic of violence against women has been during COVID-19, both globally and locally. They illustrated how prescriptions to stay at home and stay safe from the virus has meant, sadly, for many women to remain trapped indoors with abusive partners, making their homes the most unsafe space to inhabit during the lockdown. This sad reality was powerfully expressed by Instagram images (see Figure 18).

Figure 16





THERE'S NO EXCUSE FOR ABUSE

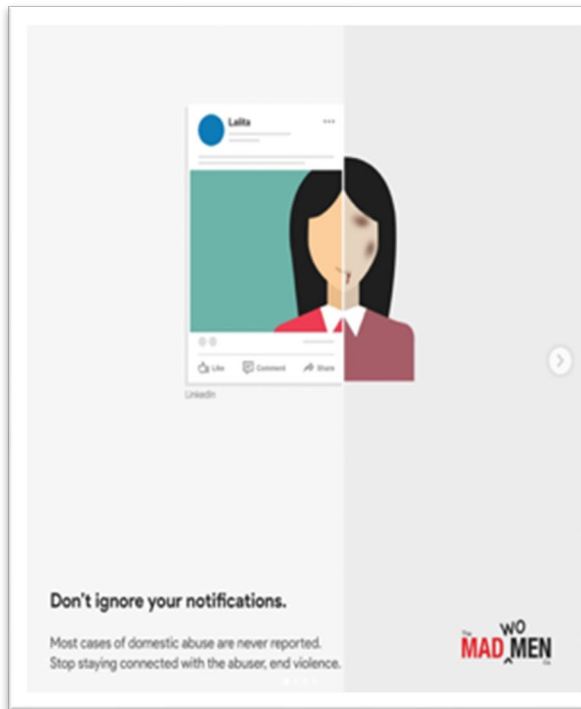
If you or someone you know is facing any form of abuse - physical, mental, emotional or sexual, get in touch with our team of expert counsellors.

Crisis Helpline:
98330 52684 / 91675 35765

One Stop Centre (KEM Hospital):
022-24100511

Email:
crisis@snehamumbai.org

Figure 17



themadwomenco · Follow

themadwomenco I am Lalita.

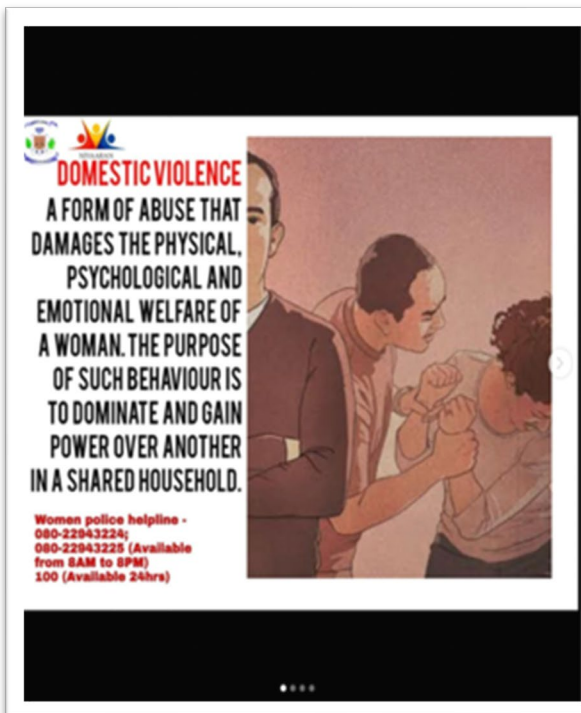
The reason so many cases of domestic violence go unreported are both personal - embarrassment, fear of retaliation, economic dependency and, societal - imbalanced power relations for men and women in society, privacy of the family, victim blaming attitudes. It's time to unmask ourselves and voice out against all forms of abuse. Because silence is violence. Join hands with @snehamumbai_official and break the silence. To know more, visit their page.

@dollyparton

Art: @akanksha.dutta
Copy: @rakshaness

23 likes
MAY 15, 2020

Add a comment... Post



nivaaransjcl · Follow
Bangalore, India

nivaaransjcl Source : "The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005". Violence is committed not merely physically but also mentally. Let's end the culture of violence.

Silence is License to Violence
Speak Out

Women police helpline -
080-22943224; 080-22943225 (Available from 8AM to 8PM)
100 (Available 24hrs)

Or send us a message @nivaaransjcl

#LockDownMeinLockUp
#SpeakingOutHelps.

39w

107 likes
MAY 13, 2020

Add a comment... Post

Figure 18



Several Instagram visuals suggest how Indian media can help to rally action by challenging the (in)visibility politics that normalizes VAW. For example, some Instagram images spread word about an independent short film, *Nikita* (The goddess of victory), on marital rape of Indian women trapped during the lockdown, as well as a Bollywood film and social commentary on DV called

Thappad (Slap), both of which make visible intersectional forces underlying GBV, including toxic masculinity and sexual terrorism (see Figure 19). The economic, emotional, physical, and sexual impact of the pandemic on Indian women and their lack of access to mental and health resources, due to both patriarchal and lockdown-initiated “restrictions on relocation and mobility,” have rendered this at-risk population even more exposed to the oppressive machinations of power, gender privilege, structural inequities, and mental health problems (Agarwal & Sharma, 2020; Mathews, 2020; Dhawan, 2020). This dim reality is also reflected in this Instagram story by the media production company @laghu_katha_production on the significance of the Indian short film, *Nikita*:

The lockdown that we are facing due to the current pandemic has caused the entire nation to feel helpless and caged in the scaled down walls of their houses. But, what about those women who stay feeble and voiceless throughout their lives? Women, who are subjugated to domestic violence and abuse on a daily basis. Those who go through mental torture because of the society that has bound them in the chains of patriarchy. The male dominated society that has placed a man’s honour in between a woman’s legs. What about those women who get sexually objectified and are threatened to be raped the moment they demand equality? The lockdown is only a small visual of my life. *Nikita* - my name symbolizes victory and yet I am that woman who died trying to fathom these answers. #LockDownMeinLockUp @snehamumbai_official (Instagram, 2020).

Figure 19



Discussion

The COVID-10 crisis has compelled us to converge and insulate global-local boundaries and human proximities and witness the infiltration of geospatial borders by a viral coup. It has

made us rethink everything, including our communication practices, media habits, and social involvements. Not only does our new world order call for a type of hybridization or globalization of national, economic, social, and health discourses, but it simultaneously calls for socially distancing ourselves from using global lenses to see and act upon human injustice and communication phenomena at local and cultural levels. One such phenomenon is GBV, specifically DV, which saw a global increase during the coronavirus lockdowns in 2020 (Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2020).

Educating people—victims, survivors, offenders, enablers, stakeholders, and the cultures that support them—of how widespread and toxic DV is happens to be very challenging. Public ills like DV are often reduced to private, customary, or insignificant actions. These afflictions are largely borne by women. In such contexts, recognizing abuse and altering abusive behavior is key, which requires the abused and (if possible) the abusers to be willing to speak up, seek help, and make changes. To do that is incredibly difficult in real spaces where, by and large, families and communities teach the abused to remain silent while teaching abusers to punish the abused. It is then up to digital platforms and their publics to be visibility-performers, naming-agents, storytellers, connectors to influencers, and change-makers. They must also be actors and embodiments of resistance for female survivors of violence who have faced horrific experiences that are hard enough for many of us to imagine, not to mention the immense courage the women have shown by sharing their stories with others so that they can be transformed into powerful knowledge episodes about power, privilege, suffering, and the need for gender justice.

Our experiences as digital publics, at least in the more networked urban spaces, have made us privy to the affective affordances of social media and their connective and visual artifacts such as hashtags and selfies that to a large extent helps the disenfranchised to locate their voice and share their story so others can pay heed and act. In cultural contexts where mainstream media and feminist or social activism are restricted, censored, and policed by self- and state-ordained gatekeepers of politics, religion, tradition, and morality, social media and its algorithms of discursive democracies have had the liminal power to interrupt, if not fundamentally change, public opinion and policies governing who gets justice and who doesn't. At the minimum, research shows us that digital counter publics, selfie-resistance, and hashtivism can be used as facilitators to push social establishments toward progress and desired changes (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2012; Jackson & Welles, 2015). As in the case of #LockDownMeinLockUp and its possibilities for selfie-resistance and visual activism, it is evident that this Instagram social campaign came out of the absolute need to do something urgent and palpable to help a resource-limited, at-risk group of women at a time when their mental and physical health was even more threatened by the forced immobility mandated by the pandemic.

Conclusion

Digital spaces of feminist activism are not without their decriers and misogynist trolls, who not only deny survivors their suffering and dispute social progress mobilized by advocates, but also add to cycles of violence by normalizing victim-blaming and shaming rhetoric (Mukherjee & Dexter, 2020). Future studies, following in the footsteps of research on digital activism trends like India's #MeToo, and America's #WhyIStayed and #MuteRKelly movements (Roy, 2018; Pain, 2020; Weathers et al., 2016; Mukherjee & Dexter, 2020), should continue exploring how cultures steeped in toxic masculinity and repressed sexuality trigger instances of digital misogyny and instigate a frenzy of antipathy toward victim-empathy and allyship, while refuting offender

accountability. Future scholarship on digital activism should also keep critiquing the dangers of negotiating selfie activism and in/visibility politics to address oppressions endured by vulnerable populations. For example, Raji (2017) asks us to consider deeper questions regarding who has access to this form of visual digital activism, whether it is enough to represent marginalized groups and their intersectional issues. She asks how likely it is for selfie-activism to be diluted to “clicktivism” (online petition-signing, liking, clicking, etc.), and if, like some failed instances of hashtivism, it “can be used to brand and rebrand online activists into marketable commodities” (Raji, 2017, pp. 153-54; White 2010). Whatever reservations there may be, decade-long research on selfie-cultures, social justice, and hashtivism also suggests that in creating the capital of civic connection and the “currency of visibility in today’s digital politics,” digital visual artifacts create opportunities for embodied resistance for both performer-selves and perceiver-others (Kuntsman, 2017, p. 17). They create present opportunities to study intersections of selfies and hashtags and suggest interventions for DV embodied in digital activism like #LockDownMeinLockUp.

To address this study’s research question, the findings suggest that the #LockDownMeinLockUp hashtivism and its resistance images act as a space of liminal and locally situated activism offering visual immediacy, connective visibility, influencer affinity and affective mobilization against DV amidst India’s COVID-19 lockdown. The measure of its material success can be evidenced in the funds raised through the campaign (which exceeded their initial goal), as well as in its social engagement, which “saw over 1,800 posts in just 5 days of the campaign launch” (Siriti Creative, 2021). The short-term material impact is undoubtedly the digital campaign’s success in fundraising for DV interventions and peri- and post-pandemic care and safety measures for many abused women. Yet its enduring impact, in situations of global-local crises or not, is contingent on how much is yet to be done on a structural level to address India’s sweeping gender inequities, victim invisibility, intersectional issues that lead to DV, and the systems that support and exacerbate the endemic of violence against women.

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