



Social media exposure to caste-based discrimination and aggressive behaviour among adolescents: a review through an Ambedkarian perspective

Neha Amian* and Mahadevaswamy P.

¹Department of Studies and Research in Psychology, Karnataka State Open University, Mysuru - 570006, India

Abstract—The rapid expansion of social media has significantly transformed adolescents' social interactions, identity formation, and exposure to social issues [1]. Although digital platforms provide opportunities for communication and empowerment, they have also become spaces where traditional social inequalities, including caste-based discrimination, are reproduced [2]. This review paper examines existing literature on the relationship between social media exposure to discriminatory content, social identity threat, emotional distress, and aggressive behaviour among adolescents through an Ambedkarian perspective. Existing studies suggest that exposure to online prejudice, hate speech, and exclusion may negatively influence adolescents' psychological well-being by creating feelings of rejection, anger, and identity threat [3], [4]. The review further discusses Ambedkar's principles of dignity, equality, education, and social empowerment as psychological resources that can strengthen resilience against discrimination [5]. The review identifies a significant gap in research concerning caste-based discrimination in digital environments and emphasizes the need for interdisciplinary studies integrating psychology, caste studies, and digital media research.

Keywords: *Social media; caste-based discrimination; adolescents; social identity threat; aggression; Ambedkarian perspective; digital discrimination*

Received 19 June 2014; **Revised** 10 July 2026; **Accepted** 26 July 2026; **Available online** 15 Aug 2026

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental period characterized by identity formation, emotional sensitivity, and increased dependence on peer relationships [6], [7]. With the widespread use of digital technologies, social media has become an important environment where adolescents construct their identities and interact with others [1].

While social media offers opportunities for social connection and self-expression, it also exposes adolescents to harmful experiences such as cyberbullying, hate speech, and discriminatory interactions [8]. Online spaces often reflect existing societal inequalities, including discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, and caste [2]. In the Indian context, caste-based prejudice has increasingly become visible in digital spaces through hate comments, exclusionary discussions, and derogatory representations [9].

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar argued that caste is a system of

social hierarchy that undermines human dignity, equality, and individual freedom [5]. Applying an Ambedkarian perspective helps in understanding online caste discrimination not merely as a social problem but as a psychological experience affecting identity, belongingness, and self-respect.

2. Review Method

The present article follows a narrative review approach by examining theoretical and empirical literature related to social media use, online discrimination, social identity threat, adolescent aggression, caste-based inequality, and Ambedkar's philosophy of social justice. Literature from psychology, cyberpsychology, sociology, and digital studies was synthesized to understand the psychological pathways connecting online discrimination and aggressive behaviour [10], [3].

3. Social Media and Adolescent Psychological Development

Social media has become a central context for adolescent development, influencing self-concept, interpersonal relation-

*Corresponding author.

E-mail address: nehaaiman11@gmail.com (Neha Amian)

© 2026 Vaishakha Publishers. All rights reserved.

ships, and emotional experiences [1]. Research suggests that online interactions can provide social support and opportunities for self-expression; however, negative online experiences may contribute to psychological distress, loneliness, anxiety, and behavioural problems [11].

Cyberbullying and exposure to hostile online environments have been associated with increased emotional difficulties and aggressive tendencies among adolescents [12]. These findings indicate that the quality of online experiences plays an important role in adolescent psychological adjustment.

4. Caste-Based Discrimination in Digital Spaces

Digital platforms often reproduce existing social inequalities rather than eliminating them [2]. Studies on digital caste discrimination indicate that social media may become a platform for casteist abuse, exclusion, harassment, and the reinforcement of traditional hierarchies [9]. For adolescents belonging to marginalized caste groups, exposure to such content may produce feelings of social rejection, shame, and reduced self-esteem. Research on perceived discrimination demonstrates that repeated experiences of prejudice are associated with psychological stress, emotional difficulties, and reduced well-being [4].

5. Social Identity Threat and Aggressive Behaviour

According to Social Identity Theory, individuals derive a sense of self from their membership in social groups, and threats to these identities can lead to emotional and behavioural consequences [13]. When adolescents perceive that their social identity is devalued or attacked, they may experience identity threat, anger, and psychological distress [14].

The frustration–aggression hypothesis proposes that experiences of frustration and perceived injustice can increase aggressive responses [15]. Similarly, the General Aggression Model explains that negative experiences and emotions may influence aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behaviours [16]. Therefore, repeated exposure to caste-based hostility in online spaces may contribute to aggression through emotional pathways.

6. Ambedkarian Perspective on Psychological Dignity and Resistance

Ambedkar’s philosophy emphasizes liberty, equality, fraternity, and education as essential for achieving human dignity and social transformation [5]. His ideas highlight that oppression affects not only social status but also an individual’s sense of self-respect and psychological freedom [17].

From a psychological perspective, education, critical awareness, and social empowerment can function as protective factors that enhance resilience and reduce the negative impact of discrimination. Applying an Ambedkarian lens to digital experiences helps broaden psychological understanding of caste-based online hostility.

7. Research Gap

Previous studies have extensively examined social media use, cyberbullying, discrimination, and adolescent aggression [12], [11]. However, limited research has specifically focused on caste-based discrimination in digital environments and its psychological consequences among adolescents. Furthermore, the integration of Ambedkar’s philosophy with contemporary psychological theories such as social identity threat and aggression remains underdeveloped, indicating an important area for future interdisciplinary research.

8. Conclusion

The reviewed literature suggests that social media has become a significant environment where adolescents encounter both social support and social hostility. Exposure to caste-based discrimination online can threaten social identity, create emotional distress, and potentially contribute to aggressive behaviour [4], [16]. An Ambedkarian perspective enriches this understanding by emphasizing human dignity, equality, education, and empowerment as important responses to digital discrimination. Future empirical studies are needed to examine these relationships among diverse adolescent populations.

References

- [1] Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2011). Online communication among adolescents: An integrated model of its attraction, opportunities, and risks. *Journal of adolescent health*, 48(2), 121–127.
- [2] Noble, S. U. (2018). *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York University Press.
- [3] Williams, K. D. (2007). Ostracism. *Annu. Rev. Psychol.*, 58(1), 425–452.
- [4] Pascoe, E. A., & Smart Richman, L. (2009). Perceived discrimination and health: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 135(4), 531–554.
- [5] Ambedkar, B. R. (2014). *Annihilation of Caste*. Navayana. (Original work published 1936)
- [6] Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. W. W. Norton.

- [7] Steinberg, L. (2014). *Age of Opportunity: Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- [8] Patchin, J. W., & Hinduja, S. (2015). *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- [9] Soundararajan, T., Varatharajan, J., & Keerthi, N. (2022). *The Caste in the United States: A Survey of Caste Among South Asian Americans*. Equality Labs.
- [10] Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497–529.
- [11] Keles, B., McCrae, N., & Grealish, A. (2020). A systematic review: The influence of social media on depression, anxiety, and psychological distress in adolescents. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 25(1), 79–93.
- [12] Kowalski, R. M., Giumetti, G. W., Schroeder, A. N., & Lattanner, M. R. (2014). Bullying in the digital age: A critical review and meta-analysis of cyberbullying research among youth. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(4), 1073–1137.
- [13] Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
- [14] Steele, C. M., Spencer, S. J., & Aronson, J. (2002). Contending with group image: The psychology of stereotype and social identity threat. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 34, 379–440.
- [15] Dollard, J., Doob, L. W., Miller, N. E., Mowrer, O. H., & Sears, R. R. (1939). *Frustration and Aggression*. Yale University Press.
- [16] Anderson, C. A., & Bushman, B. J. (2002). Human aggression. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53, 27–51.
- [17] Omvedt, G. (2004). *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*. Penguin Books.