Reclaiming the Night: A Case Study on Reception of #JusticeForRGKar on Selected Social Media Platforms

Tanmay Samanta
St. Xavier's University, Kolkata, India
Sraya Banerjee
Berhampur University, India

Abstract

"Reclaim the Night" or "Night is Ours" is a mass movement sparked by the demand for justice in the rape and murder case of a junior doctor at Radha Gobinda Kar Medical College in Kolkata, West Bengal, India. The movement has underscored the transformative power of social media in mobilizing people from various walks of life, as thousands congregated in the streets to advocate for justice and demand safety for women in the workplace. Employing Goffman's framing theory, this study examines how social media enabled extensive awareness, solidarity, and collective action among various communities through the analysis of digital activism strategies. Using a qualitative approach, this study investigates the intersection of gender, justice, and digital activism, focusing on how social media posts, news reports, and protest coverage fuelled solidarity and global awareness. This research underscores the significant impact of social media in sustaining grassroots movements, particularly in challenging traditional power structures and ensuring that marginalized voices are heard. Hashtags, such as #JusticeForRGKar; online group; and worldwide solidarity activities highlight the importance of digital activism in the long-term success of social movements. All of the visuals work together to amplify the core messages of defiance, unity, and systematic reform.

Keywords: Reclaim the Night; Justice for RG Kar; Night is Ours; social media; digital activism; gender justice.

Introduction

The emergence of digital platforms has revolutionized the landscape of activism, significantly altering how movements for social change are organized, communicated, and mobilized. The "Reclaim the Night" or "Night is Ours" campaign, which arose in reaction to the horrific rape and murder of a young doctor at RG Kar Medical College in Kolkata, West Bengal, India is among the most significant recent instances of this phenomenon. This tragedy highlighted the widespread challenges of gender-based violence and structural inequalities confronting women, while also catalyzing social anger and action on both local and global scales.

Rape, after all, is a power-based crime. Power is intricately embedded within the fabric of our societal structures, manifesting in our institutions and influencing our daily interactions with individuals, contingent upon their gender, class, or caste. The organizers of the Reclaim the Night movement have unequivocally stated their refusal to entertain any rationale that seeks to

impose limitations on the mobility, freedom, and autonomy of women and other gender minorities under the guise of "protection" (de, 2024).

The movement brought many people together throughout West Bengal, India; around the nation; and even in a few locations outside of India. During the protest, there as a notable absence of political flags. Rather, demonstrators demanded justice for the horrific crime by holding placards and the national flag. Kolkata had never witnessed a spontaneous protest of such magnitude (Livemint, 2024). One might argue that it is not creating "history" but a her/queer/transgender narrative, since it has unified people in anger and led them out into the streets. As a result of this campaign, women from all walks of life, including students, faculty, and employees in various healthcare professions, have taken to the roads to demand equal rights and affirmative action. The voices of women from rural and suburban regions have joined those of the thousands upon thousands who have taken to the streets from midnight till the crack of dawn in support of the cause (Menon, 2024).

The Reclaim the Night campaign serves as a potent reminder that there is still much work to be done in the battle against patriarchal violence. It is an appeal to everyone who supports equality, fairness, and the freedom to live fearlessly. The struggle is against the system that permits these atrocities, not simply the perpetrators (Liberation, 2024). This article examines the function of digital platforms in advancing the Reclaim the Night campaign an essential element of the larger movement that united diverse groups in West Bengal and beyond. The movement advocated for justice and highlighted the precarious status of women in hazardous work environments through grassroots rallies involving participants from diverse backgrounds, including students, healthcare professionals, and LGBTQ+ activists.

Background

In the early morning of August 9, the tragic death at Kolkata's R G Kar Medical College and Hospital stunned the state of West Bengal. A young post-graduate trainee doctor was violently raped and killed at her place of employment in the Chest Medicine Department. The incident has ignited public outcry and highlighted issues around job safety, particularly for women. Despite evident injuries that indicated a criminal offense, procedural delays slowed the filing of a First Information Report (FIR), which was finally registered only late that night. The Supreme Court heard arguments over this holdup on August 22, highlighting claims of administrative carelessness. The episode heightened the examination of corruption and possible concealment efforts inside public institutions, especially regarding the hospital administration's involvement, and incited extensive calls for justice and responsibility. Even when Sanjay Roy, the main suspect, was arrested on August 10, public indignation persisted. The incident has brought to light long-standing issues within public hospitals and has sparked discussions about the role of institutional leadership in ensuring transparency and accountability (Liberation, 2024).

A formidable movement emerged in reaction to the egregious victim-blaming and attempts to conceal the heinous rape and murder. Beginning in Kolkata, the Reclaim the Night campaign quickly spread all over the world. Rimjhim Sinha, a social worker, researcher, and woman who initiated the campaign, told Press Trust of India (PTI), "At first, we made a call for women to meet at three places in Kolkata at night, Jadavpur 8B Bus Stand, College Street, and the Academy of Fine Arts, but it turned into a mass protest" and demonstrations occurred at many locations inside the city and its surrounding areas (HT News Desk, 2024).

As a response, on August 14 after 11 p.m., thousands of women took over the streets, highways, and lanes in both rural and urban regions under the slogan "Meyera, Rat dakhol karo", or "Girls, Reclaim the Night." This was unequivocally unparalleled in history. Housewives accompanied resolute feminists. Female gig workers joined nurses in solidarity. Educators accompanied midday meal personnel. Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers accompanied female physicians, while transgender women stood in solidarity with cisgender women (Das, 2024). Their demands included a safer workplace for women and justice for Tilottama (the young doctor). The event in Kolkata was the immediate cause, but the idea that women should have equal access to public areas at all hours of the day and night was far more powerful (Bhura, 2024).

Review of Literature

The Reclaim the Night movement stands as a powerful testament to women's resistance against gender-based violence and their demand for safety in public spaces. Its history is rooted in the feminist movements of the 1970s, with origins in both Germany and the United Kingdom (UK) (Biswas & Das, 2024).

The movement emerged in the late 1970s, fuelled by women's anger and fear surrounding sexual violence. In 1977, Reclaim the Night movement really took off in the UK, particularly in Leeds. In the United Kingdom, the Reclaim the Night movement

really gained steam in 1977, especially in the city of Leeds. The direct impetus was the wave of brutal murders by the man who later proved to be the Yorkshire Ripper, whose victims were mostly women. These offenses established a widespread culture of fear and revealed the ineffectiveness of police responses, which tended to encourage women to remain indoors during the night instead of seeking solutions to gender-based violence. To challenge the authorities' victim-blaming behavior and claim women's right to enjoy safe access to the streets, the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group initiated the UK's first official Reclaim the Night march (Benton, 2022). The trigger for the Reclaim the Night movement was instigated by feminists in Leeds, where four of the initial six victims of the Yorkshire Ripper had been slain—killings that would go on to result in thirteen women losing their lives. As an answer to this violence and overall atmosphere of terror, the movement framed itself around two broad themes: "fight rape" and "every woman deserves to walk alone at night without fear." It spread rapidly across national borders, sparking similar demonstrations worldwide (Close, 2023). In the United States, the movement grew to become "Take Back the Night," the first march of which was in San Francisco in 1978. Canada also saw the emergence of similar initiatives, with initial events held in Toronto and Vancouver. In Vancouver, the first Take Back the Night rally was held in 1978 by an ad hoc group, the "Fly-by-Night Collective" (Joan, 1985).

Over time, the movement has evolved to encompass broader issues of gender inequality, systemic injustice, and intersectionality. Today, Reclaim the Night marches continue to be held worldwide, serving as a powerful symbol of resistance against gender-based violence and a call for safer streets. Social media has emerged as one of the most significant tools facilitating political participation and protest behavior. In this context, the #JusticeForRGKar movement can be considered one of the most effective forms of social justice activism working toward a critical break from systemic injustices and fostering a collective awareness of social equity.

Role of Social Media in Activism

Social media plays an important role in the spread of information concerning protests, thus allowing activists to plan and muster resources easily. Regarding the #JusticeForRGKar movement, social media help in sharing logistics, emotional support, and personal narratives within the group, which builds the community among activists. Social media empowers political protest through the triad of information dissemination, motivation, and social network engagement (Jost et al., 2018). Networked feminism, driven by digital tools, fosters new alliances and transnational feminist resistance but also introduces tensions due to unequal power dynamics. Digital activism offers opportunities for collective consciousness but also exposes feminists to harassment and backlash. Vulnerability, both as a condition and a mobilizing force, plays a key role in these movements, with the digital space contributing to embodied feminist politics (Vachhani, 2024).

Insights into collective identity formation, especially those emerging from the #YoSoy132 movement, are particularly relevant to understanding the #JusticeForRGKar movement. Social media also fosters internal communication, which allows activists to create "comfort zones" for solidarity; this is essential for developing a common identity (Treré, 2015). Creating such a comfort zone would enhance the #JusticeForRGKar movement's cohesion and strengthen its members in resisting dominant narratives (Onuch, 2015).

Emotional imagery does have an important role to play in motivating activism; however, an image of collective efficacy may prove to be more potent than one that elicits only an emotional response. Potent imagery that embodies unification and purpose could be utilized by the #JusticeForRGKar movement to further amplify their social media visibility and engagement (Scherman et al., 2015). Trust within social media networks is often shaped by the strength of social ties, which can foster higher levels of trust among users. This is crucial in the context of the #JusticeForRGKar campaign, as the cultivation of trust through open communication would help create a sense of cohesion and massive mobilization among participants (Kharroub & Bas, 2016).

Within feminist social movements, X (formally known as Twitter) has played a crucial role by enabling survivors of sexual assault to share their experiences through hashtags like #MeToo and #WhyIDidntReport, thereby fostering community and support. Thematic analysis reveals that users use hashtag activism to share stories, promote action, and discuss political issues. However, challenges such as victim-blaming and secondary victimization persist. Despite these obstacles, platforms like X continue to support solidarity and emotional connections in feminist movements (Li et al., 2021).

Despite the useful information offered by these existing studies, many knowledge gaps exist, warranting further research. Such studies may encompass specific dynamics of friendship or social ties in online networks, how they relate to the impact of movements such as #JusticeForRGKar, and deeper insights into the long-term impacts of social media engagement for collective identity and activism. A deeper exploration of the role of different social media platforms and their unique

affordances can show more subtle points in digital activism. The scope of "ludic activism" could also be further studied to determine how a more playful engagement may attract younger audiences and bolster the reach of the movement.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Using framing theory as a framework, this study examines how social media influenced the story of the RG Kar incident and the Reclaim the Night campaign. Framing theory elucidates how media platforms emphasize some facets of an issue while minimizing others, thereby shaping public perception and comprehension.

In 1972, Gregory Bateson first proposed the idea of framing (Arowolo, 2017). In his 1974 work, Goffman proposed the idea of "frame analysis," which highlights the impact of media portrayals on our perceptions of social reality (Media Theory, 2023). While framing is rooted in the agenda-setting tradition, it extends beyond merely highlighting topics by emphasizing how issues are presented and interpreted. Framing theory suggests that news outlets not only give certain stories more prominence but also shape their meaning through specific narratives and emphases (Arowolo, 2017). Although framing functions as a two-way process, it primarily serves to simplify complex information. Frames are instrumental in the interpretation and reconstruction of reality (Volkmer, 2009). This perspective is significant because it assumes that individuals act based on their distinct perceptions of the world (Zamith, 2022).

This article examines how digital platforms organized local communities and garnered worldwide attention for the campaign. Additionally, public comments are analyzed to understand how the victim was portrayed. The conceptual framework integrates concepts from digital activism, emphasizing the role of social media as a mechanism for grassroots mobilization, promoting solidarity and hope, and enabling oppressed groups to reclaim public places.

Objectives and Method

This study aims to examine the influence of social media on the Reclaim the Night movement, particularly how digital platforms mobilized public sentiment, shaped the narrative regarding the RG Kar rape and murder case, and enabled collective action for gender justice. This article examines how social media framed the RG Kar incident and the protests. The study explores the role of hashtags and viral posts in spreading awareness and analyzes how social media influencers contributed to raising awareness.

To achieve the above objectives, this study adopts a qualitative approach to investigate the influence of social media in framing the RG Kar incident and the Reclaim the Night campaign. A detailed content analysis is conducted to examine social media post, hashtags, and viral material relevant to the movement. This involves researching social media channels like YouTube, X, Facebook, and Instagram for essential themes, narratives, and framing of the demonstrations. The hashtags #JusticeForRGKar, #ReclaimTheNight, and linked postings are investigated determine how they influenced public mood and raised awareness. Additionally, the material is evaluated to identify recurring themes, such as justice for victims, women's safety, and reclaiming public places. The framing of these issues is investigated to establish how social media influenced the conversation around the campaign.

Data are collected from several digital sources, including social media platforms, online news articles, YouTube videos, and recorded interviews on social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and X) with prominent activists engaged in the campaign. Screenshots, postings, tweets, and multimedia content are gathered to record the public reactions on the internet. Purposive sampling is used to choose social media postings and articles with elevated engagement rates or viral reach. This includes posts that used popular hashtags and had substantial interactions (likes, shares, and comments). Data are collected within the period of August 10, 2024, to November 10, 2024 (3 months after the incident date).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Rapid Mobilization

The rapid mobilization of these protests underscores the transformative power of social media in organizing large-scale movements. The process began when Rimjhim Sinha, a researcher and social activist initially called for Reclaim the Night protests through her Facebook post. However, the post quickly went viral, igniting a wave of decentralized activism. Individuals and groups across West Bengal, later India, and even outside of the country started organizing their own protests without a central leadership structure, demonstrating the organic nature of the movement. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp played a crucial role in spreading information rapidly. Protest details, posters, and calls to action

were widely circulated in social media groups, pages, and private chats, ensuring maximum participation. A single organization did not lead the protests; instead, people took to the streets based on their convictions, responding to shared posts and messages. Reports indicate that demonstrations occurred in approximately 150 significant locations across West Bengal, showing the extent of digital mobilization.

In an interview with NDTV, Rimjhim Sinha revealed that before August 15, her phone rang every second as people from different parts of the state wanted to connect and join the protests. She described how the public's anger was like burning coal, waiting for a spark, and her Facebook post became that flame. The power of social media allowed people to circulate posters, share their thoughts, and spontaneously take to the streets in what she described as a spring-like movement. Facebook emerged as a critical platform for organizing these protests, as mainstream media lacked the capacity to cover every demonstration happening across the state (NDTV, 2024). As a result, the movement was successfully mobilized in nearly every corner of West Bengal, proving that digital activism could achieve what traditional media could not. The protests were further fueled by the insensitive remark of Sandip Ghosh, the former principal of RG Kar Medical College, who blamed the victim for being alone at night. His comment acted as a catalyst, intensifying public outrage and prompting thousands of women to demand accountability. The protest slogan "Reclaim the Night, Reclaim the Rights" resonated with women from all walks of life, leading to widespread demonstrations in cities like Howrah, Hooghly, and Jhargram.

The movement was not just about seeking justice for the RG Kar incident but also about challenging patriarchal norms that restricted women's mobility and safety at night. One of the most significant aspects of the mobilization was how social media facilitated the spread of powerful slogans emphasizing consent. Inspired by a viral video from Dhaka University, Kolkata protesters popularized the chant, "Wherever I go, however I dress, no means no, yes means yes," further reinforcing the movement's message. The government attempted to pacify the protesters by passing the Aparajita Women and Child (West Bengal Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill (2024) (West Bengal Legislative Assembly, 2024). Notwithstanding the enactment of anti-rape legislation, demonstrators continued their fight, seeking systemic changes rather than top-down solutions. On October 3, 2024, a "Rater Meeting" (night meeting) was held in Kolkata's Shyambazar, where women from different socio-economic backgrounds shared personal experiences of violence, workplace harassment, and gender discrimination (Pal, 2025). These open forums allowed marginalized voices to be heard, reinforcing the grassroots nature of the protests. Ultimately, the rapid mobilization of the movement can be attributed to social media's ability to amplify local issues, provide a platform for collective action, and create a decentralized yet unified front against gender-based violence.

Continued Activism

Many Facebook and Instagram pages were created to demand justice for RG Kar and Reclaim the Night. Several WhatsApp groups were also formed for discussions and coordination. These platforms helped people stay connected and share information. They kept the movement alive by organizing protests and events. Social media allowed quick updates and wider reach. People found support and solidarity in these online communities.

Hashtag Engagement

The analysis of hashtag usage surrounding the RG Kar incident and the subsequent protests highlights how social media played a crucial role in shaping public discourse and mobilizing support. The selected hashtags can be categorized into two primary groups: incident-specific and action-oriented. Hashtags such as #JusticeForRGKar, #JusticeForAbhaya, #JusticeForTilottama, #KolkataRapeMurder, and #KolkataDoctorMurder directly referenced the tragic event, ensuring that the case remained in the public consciousness. Meanwhile, action-driven hashtags like #ReclaimTheNight, #DoctorsStrikeKolkata, #DoctorsProtests, and #KolkataNightProtests emphasized collective activism and the broader fight against gender-based violence.

Figure 1

Keywords Metrics
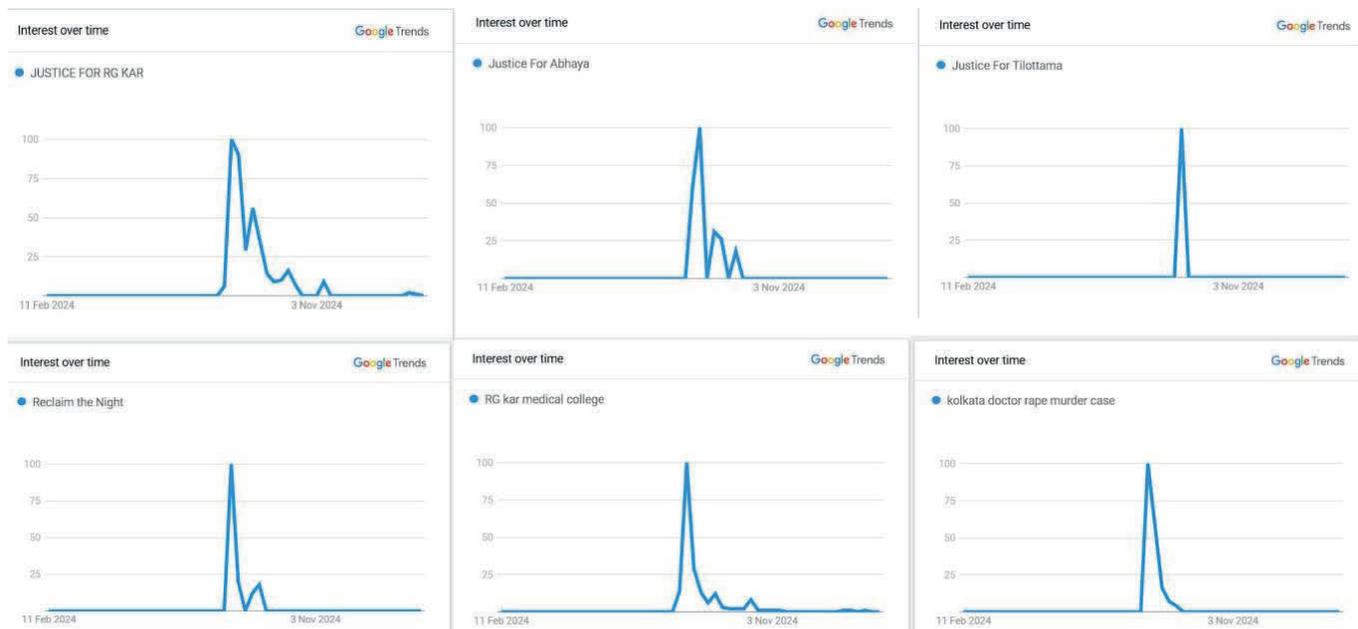
Note. Source: Google Trends

The hashtag #JusticeForRGKar garnered approximately 1,90,000 Google search results and over 83,300 Instagram posts, reflecting the public's strong demand for accountability (See Figure 1). Similarly, the hashtag #ReclaimTheNight yielded around 17,10,000 Google search results and had a substantial presence on Facebook (27,000 posts) and Instagram (24,400 posts), indicating the movement's growing momentum beyond the specific case. Other related hashtags, such as #KolkataRapeMurder (2,75,000 Google results) and #KolkataDoctorMurder (1,99,000) also showed considerable traction, indicating widespread online discussions. The significant search volume and engagement with these hashtags highlight how digital activism influenced public sentiment, mobilized protests, and connected local movements with global conversations on women's safety. The repeated use of both #JusticeForRGKar and #ReclaimTheNight in numerous posts underscores a crucial link between seeking justice for an individual case and advocating for systemic change. The data suggests that hashtags were not only tools for raising awareness but were also instrumental in sustaining momentum, encouraging discussions, and ensuring that the movement remained at the forefront of social and political debates. The geographical specificity of many hashtags helped focus attention on Kolkata while also drawing national and international support. This strategic use of digital platforms amplified voices that might otherwise have been ignored, demonstrating the power of social media in contemporary activism.

Influencer Engagement

Content creators played a crucial role in amplifying the RG Kar incident and the Reclaim the Night movement. Their videos and social media engagement helped raise awareness, mobilize people, and keep the conversation alive (Table 1).

Bengali content creator Poulami Nag made significant contributions through her YouTube channel @Hothatjodiuthlokotha. She was present on the ground on the night of August 14, capturing crucial footage and providing real-time updates. From August 11 to September 20, 2024, she uploaded 39 videos, some of which garnered over a million views, shaping public opinion and spreading awareness.

Similarly, Sanmoy Banerjee, a well-known Bengali content creator, uploaded 42 videos on his channel @SANMOYBANERJEE during the same period. His investigative approach brought forward explosive information, making people more aware of the issue and its underlying factors.

Other prominent Bengali content creators, including Kiran Dutta (@TheBongGuyOfficial), Mrinmoy Das (@Cinebap), and Prahlad Maity (@bisaktochele), actively created content urging people to join protests. Their reach and influence encouraged many to take action. Jhilam Gupta (@JhilamGuptaOriginal) also played a vital role by inviting people to participate in the Reclaim the Night movement, making it more impactful.

Beyond Bengal, national-level content creators also addressed the incident. Nitish Rajput (@NitishRajput) released a video titled *Kolkata Doctor Case* on August 27, 2024, which gained 12 million views and 24,000 comments in just 28 days. His detailed explanation resonated with a vast audience, fueling national outrage (Rajput, 2024).

Popular YouTuber Dhruv Rathee (@dhruvrathee) uploaded a video on August 24, 2024, titled *Kolkata Case | Why is India so UNSAFE For Women?* The video highlighted the protests, demands for West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's resignation, and the deeper societal issues behind crimes against women. It amassed 19 million views and 64,000 comments, sparking widespread discussions (Rathee, 2024).

Mohak Mangal (@mohak_mangal), in his video *Kolkata Doctor R@PE Case | Who is Responsible?*, uploaded on August 17, 2024, discussed systemic corruption and political interference. The video garnered 4.5 million views and 7,000 comments.

Another impactful video was released on August 21, 2024, by Gaurav Thakur (@GauravThakur-GSF), titled *Dark Reality of RG Kar Medical College EXPOSED*. He detailed the hospital's background, previous criminal cases, and alleged involvement in illegal activities like pornography and drug rackets. This video received 3.5 million views and 8,000 comments (Thakur, 2024).

Ranveer Allahbadia (@ranveerallahbadia) also covered the case in a podcast on September 9, 2024, titled *KYA JUSTICE MILEGA? The Real Truth Behind the Kolkata R@pe Case | R G Kar Doctors | TRS*. He interviewed resident doctors who openly spoke about the hospital's internal threats and the toxic culture affecting students. This video had 3.5 million views and 5,000 comments within 28 days (Allahbadia, 2024).

Akash Banerjee (@thedeshbhakt) released two in-depth videos on August 14 and August 16, 2024. *Kolkata Horror | Why MORE RG Kar's Will Keep Happening. Unless… SCAW* and *Mamata Banerjee's TMC Tried To Cover Up RG Kar Case?* examined the government's alleged inaction and corruption in handling the case. These videos received 5.6 million and 2.6 million views, respectively (Banerjee, 2024).

The overwhelming response to these videos demonstrated the public's deep concern for the issue. The high engagement rates indicated that people were eager to learn more, discuss, and take action. These content creators transformed the incident from a regional tragedy into a national and global issue, pushing people to the streets in protest and shaping the structure of the Reclaim the Night movement.

Table 1

List of Impactful YouTube Content

| Content creator	Video title	Date	Topic	Views (in 28 days)	Comments (in 28 days)
Nitish Rajput	Kolkata Doctor Case	August 27, 2024	Detailed explanation of the incident	12 million	24,000
Dhruv R	Kolkata Case | Why is India so UNSAFE For Women?	August 24, 2024	Protests, CM resignation demands, women's safety	19 million	64,000
Mohak Mangal	Kolkata Doctor R@PE Case | Who is Responsible?	August 17, 2024	Systemic corruption and political interference	4.5 million	7,000
Gaurav Thakur	Dark Reality of RG Kar Medical College EXPOSED	August 21, 2024	Hospital background, criminal cases, illegal activities	3.5 million	8,000
Ranveer Allahbadia	KYA JUSTICE MILEGA? The Real Truth Behind the Kolkata R@pe Case	September 9, 2024	Interview with resident doctors on hospital culture	3.5 million	5,000
Akash Banerjee	Kolkata Horror | Why MORE RG Kar's Will Keep Happening. Unless… SCAW	August 14, 2024	Government's inaction and corruption	5.6 million	19,000
Akash Banerjee	Mamata Banerjee's TMC Tried To Cover Up RG Kar Case?	August 16, 2024	Political cover-up of the case	2.6 million	10,000

Note: Data sourced from YouTube

Celebrity Engagement

Arijit Singh's powerful song, "Aar Kobe?" (And When?), became a central anthem for the #JusticeForRGKar and #ReclaimTheNight movement (Figure 2). As a widely beloved and respected singer, his participation immediately amplified the movement's reach and emotional resonance. The song, uploaded to his official YouTube channel (Official ArijitSingh) on August 28, 2024, quickly garnered massive attention, reaching 1.3 million views in the first week and eventually surpassing three million views within 50 days. This substantial viewership indicates the potent role social media platforms play in disseminating messages related to social justice.

The song's impact extended beyond mere views. It generated over 180,000 likes and 10,000 comments, illustrating a high level of engagement and support. Furthermore, the creation of 19,000 YouTube Shorts using the official music underscores how the song inspired user-generated content, multiplying its visibility across the platform. Beyond YouTube, Aar Kobe? resonated across other social media channels. Though not directly posted on Arijit Singh's official Facebook page, various fan pages amplified different versions of the song, accumulating over six million views and 34,000 shares from just the first 10 videos listed in search results. This emphasizes the role of fan communities in furthering the reach of social justice messages. On Instagram, the song spurred the creation of over 18,600 reels, signifying its cultural impact and the emotional connection it forged with users. Arijit Singh's engagement on X also saw high engagement rates, with one post reaching 100,000 views and nearly 2,000 reactions, highlighting the potential for cross-platform mobilization (Singh, 2024).

The comments on Arijit Singh's YouTube video reflect the emotional depth and sense of solidarity the song evoked. Many praised Singh for standing up for the cause when others in Bollywood remained silent. Commenters saw the song as a "revolutionary" anthem, drawing parallels to patriotic poems and songs from India's independence movement. People shared that the song inspired them, ignited a fire within them, and served as a reminder to persist until justice is served.

Figure 2

Aar Kobe Post and Metrics
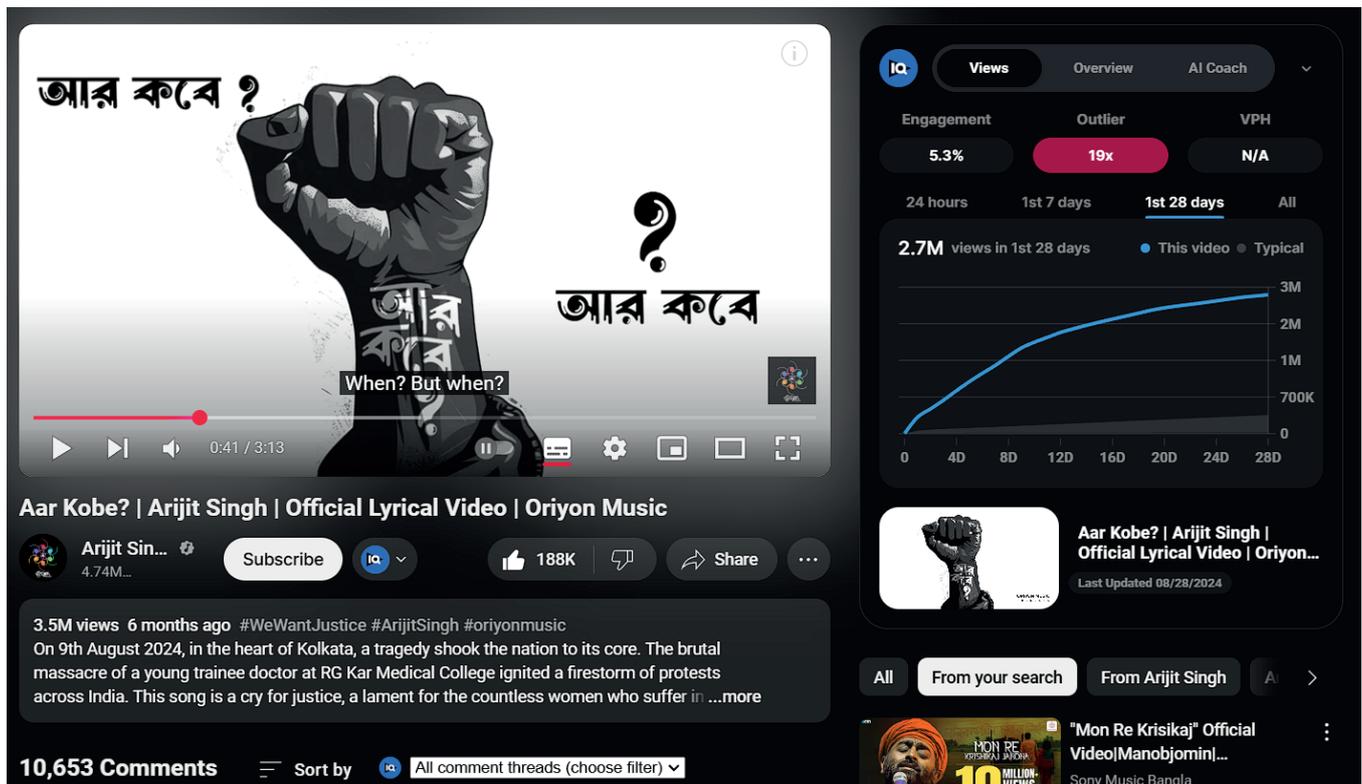
Note. Source: YouTube, Arijit Singh

Moreover, the comments highlighted a broad base of support, with people from various regions and backgrounds expressing gratitude and solidarity. The themes in these comments included demands for justice, calls for women's safety, and critiques of governmental inaction. The impact of Aar Kobe? shows that celebrity involvement can be a transformative force in social justice movements, especially when amplified through social media. Singh's actions not only raised awareness but also fostered a sense of collective identity and encouraged continued activism.

Like Arijit Singh's impactful contribution, Rupam Islam, frontman of the renowned Bengali rock band Fossils, also leveraged his platform to voice his protest against the RG Kar incident (Figure 3). His song "Khoto" (Wound), released on his official YouTube channel, resonated deeply with audiences, further illustrating the power of celebrity involvement in galvanizing social justice movements.

Rupam Islam's Khoto was explicitly dedicated to the cause, using hashtags such as #JusticeForRGKar, #JusticeForAbhaya, #JusticeForTilottama, and #JusticeForHumanity, making its purpose clear from the outset. The song garnered 191,000 views within 28 days, demonstrating a significant level of engagement and support. Islam's description of the song as a gray song played on my injured guitar" evoked a sense of vulnerability and personal investment in the cause. He highlighted the song's ability to "give life to the lyrics, give them a different meaning" in the context of the "scarred, abused time" emphasizing its role as a reflection of contemporary suffering (Islam, 2024).

Figure 3

Khoto Post and Metrics
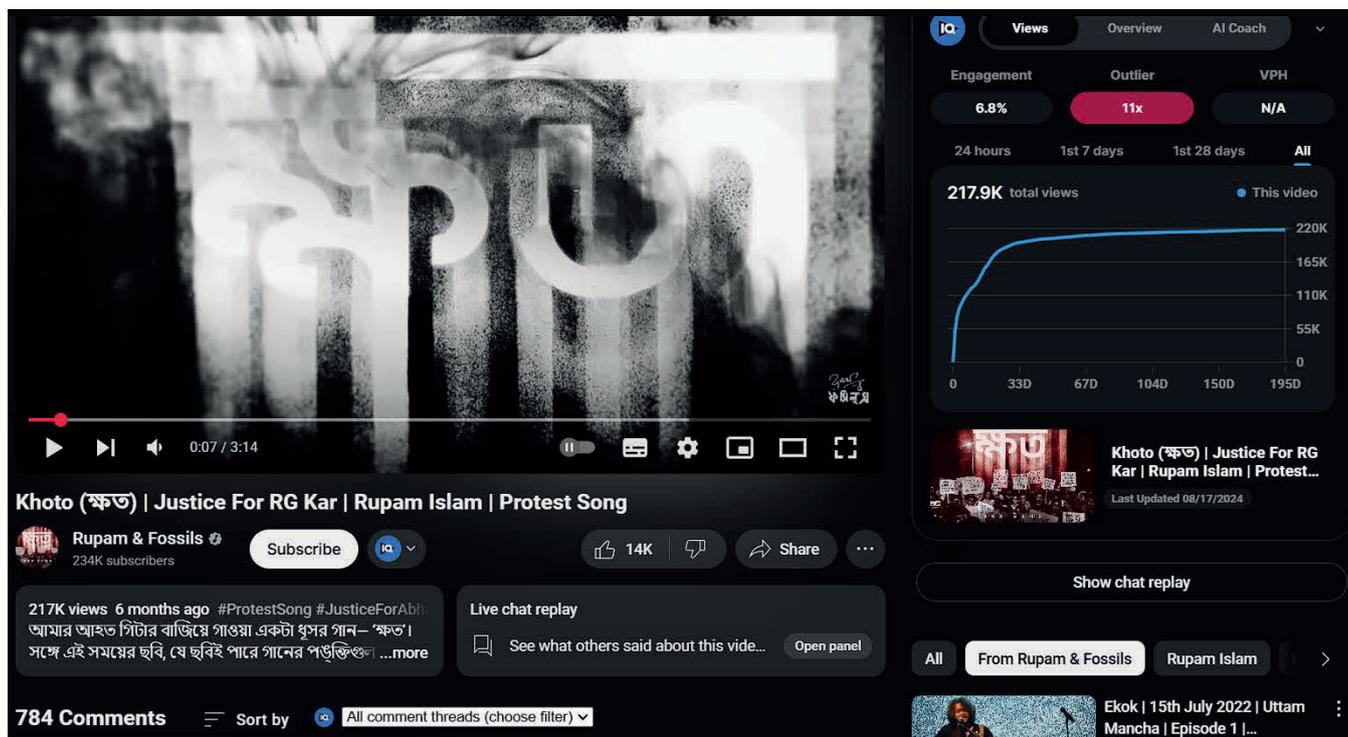
Note. Source: YouTube, Rupam & Fossils

Comments on Rupam Isla's Khoto showcase immense gratitude for his powerful voice against injustice, especially amidst perceived celebrity silence. Many lauded his integrity and unwavering stance, contrasting him with others. They expressed a deep emotional connection to the song, seeing it as a source of empowerment and renewed determination. Calls for concrete action and unwavering support highlight the song's role in galvanizing the movement, solidifying Islam's status as a cultural icon and beacon of resistance against systemic failures. Other influential figures like Mir, Sohini Sarkar, and Sreelekha Mitra used social media platforms to raise awareness. Sreelekha Mitra's consistent presence at Reclaim the Night protests, coupled with her Facebook live sessions and posts on the issue, demonstrably mobilized support. Mir Afsar Ali, a prominent radio jockey, actor, and anchor, also repeatedly addressed the issue online and joined protests, further galvanizing public attention. South Indian actress Mokksha's active participation, documented through numerous posts, reels, write-ups, and live sessions on her Facebook page, underscored the movement's widespread appeal.

Actresses such as Sohini Sengupta, Chaiti Ghosal, Debolina Dutta, Swastika Mukherjee, Aparajita Auddy, and Swagata Mukherjee actively participated in the protests and voiced their concerns on social media. Renowned writer Chandril Bhattacharjee also joined the movement, using his platform to amplify the cause. Actor Rudranil Ghosh contributed by writing and reciting powerful poems, which he shared across his social media channels.

Visual Storytelling

Visual storytelling allows complex narratives to be conveyed through imagery, capturing emotions, struggles, and resistance. The protest at R G Kar Medical College unfolds through photographs that document key aspects of student activism, institutional confrontation, and the larger implications of governance in medical education. Below, the content of the images available on social media is analysed and their contribution to the overarching narrative of the protest is explained.

Through examining the visuals of social media images some important aspects of the event are pinpointed for further analysis. These include institutional backdrop and symbolic space, silent resistance and emotional expressions, mass mobilization and collective resistance, and placards and symbolic messaging.

Figure 4

Photographs of Protests Available on Social Media

Note. Source: Facebook

In (Figure 4, image A) highlights unity and collective strength, showing that the protest is not an isolated event but a mass movement. The presence of a large crowd signifies the gravity of the issues being raised. The facial expressions of the students—determined, resolute, and often distressed—visually communicate their frustration and commitment to the cause.

Placards are key storytelling tools that immediately inform viewers about the demands and grievances of the protestors. The use of strong, contrasting colors (red, black, and white) in the signs enhances visibility and emotional impact. Such images (Figure 4, image B) also create powerful social media-ready content, allowing the movement to reach a wider audience.

Silent protests are a powerful visual strategy (Figure 4, image C), signaling defiance and resilience without verbal aggression. The focus on a single individual's motional expression makes the narrative deeply personal, urging viewers to empathize with the protestors. This also symbolizes the larger issue of being unheard or silenced within an authoritative system. The setting (Figure 4, image D) is crucial in visual storytelling. By placing the protest within the premises of the medical college, the image reinforces the legitimacy of the students' demands. The architectural presence of the institution juxtaposed against the agitated protestors visually represents the struggle between the administration and the student body.

Videos and Instagram Reels on YouTube are also analysed.

Table 2

List of YouTube Videos

Title	Channel	Published date	Length	Views	Likes	Link
গানে গানে বিদ্রোহ বাংলায়	Madhyom	2024-09-08	2m 42s	214,902	4330	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_WW3j_CCZ4
Kolkata doctor rape-murder: Women 'reclaim the night' during mass protests	BBC News India	2024-08-15	1m 17s	6,793	119	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7xN6NVNxmY
Protesters organise another candlelight vigil demanding justice for R G Kar doctor	The New Indian Express	2024-09-05	58s	1,108	29	https://youtube.com/shorts/Q7TKwWWPOUk?si=-DoCS8URT4DIdF2m
RG Kar Case: Swiggy, Zomato, Blinkit, Zepto Stage Protest in Kolkata	Republic World	2024-09-05	19s	12,446	534	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vc8D9shC5j8
we reclaim the night we reclaim the street 🖐#womenempowerment #wewantjustice #rgkarprotest #kolkata	HELLO LIFE	2024-08-15	15s	606	35	https://youtube.com/shorts/EFxzkwz6kds?si=dPmZ0L89j5Rws6FX
Reclaim the Night	Workers of the World Unite - WWU	2024-08-17	21m 46s	2,254	110	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAgioHX7BuM
RE-CLAIM THE NIGHT: RATRI DAKHAL (রাত্রি দখল)	ROANAK BHATTACHARJEE	2024-11-10	2m 23s	291	29	https://youtu.be/BRlMD7XDAZM?si=MMg2EHFfdULWKjNW

Note. Data sourced from YouTube

Many videos and Instagram reels related to the incident on YouTube are analysed. The videos revolve around protests, gender-based violence, and reclaiming public spaces for women Through analysis of Table 2, three major themes are identified: (a) videos focusing on protests demanding justice for the RG Kar doctor case; (b) videos documenting feminist movements where women march at night, asserting their right to safety; and (c) videos showcasing songs, slogans, and mass mobilization efforts.

Examination of the engagement and viewing patterns for these yields several observations: Madhyom's video (RG Kar Protest. Viral Song) had the highest engagement, with 214,902 views and 4,330 likes. This indicates that artistic and musical expressions of protests gain significant traction online. The Republic World video on food delivery workers protesting the RG Kar case had 12,446 views and 534 likes, showing that corporate and gig workers' participation in protests attracts public interest. Conversely, the BBC News India video on women reclaiming the night had only 6,793 views and 119 likes, suggesting that mainstream media coverage of protests may not always translate into high engagement. Shorter videos, such as the HELLO LIFE clip (15 seconds, 606 views, 35 likes), received relatively low engagement, likely due to format limitations.

There is a clear difference between mainstream media and independent content makers when it comes to how they cover and talk about the movement. While platforms like BBC News India and The New Indian Express provide journalistic coverage, engagement remains modest. On the other hand, independent creators such as Madhyom, HELLO LIFE, and WWU seem to

capture more attention and engagement, particularly when using music, slogans, or documentary-style storytelling. The content of different Instagram pages is also analysed.

Table 3

Insights into Instagram Contents

Instagram	URL	Hashtag/s	Caption
@sangbadpratidin	https://www.instagram.com/reel/DAJM29INT2y/?igsh=XzRvREFtbFd1	#rgkarprotest #rgkarissue #rgkarcase #rgkarincident #justiceforrgkar #civilsociety #instareel #reelvideo #sangbadpratidin	42 km long protest march by civil society to demand justice for RG Kar
@anandabazarsocial	https://www.instagram.com/reel/CqcNi2SCv2/?igsh=X2tKQ1M1enh3	#RGKarProtest #Germany #Frankfurt #RGKarIncident #JusticeForRGKar	আরজি কর-কাণ্ডের বিচার দাবিতে মিছিল জার্মানিতেও
@birsadasgupta	https://www.instagram.com/reel/DAQXjHkPeov/?igsh=QkFKdTNuQlgzYw%3D%3D	#justiceforrgkar #wewantjustice #life #now #protest	Where the mind is without fear And the head is held high

আমরা তিলোত্তমা |
| @cpimwb | https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cd9RFCvMeh/?igsh=QkFKX0l0NGpsZw%3D%3D | #AmarGhorRGKar #JusticeForRGKar | তিলোত্তমা ভয় নাই, রাজপথ ছাড়ি নাই! |

Note. Data sourced from Instagram

The use of Instagram Reels suggests a strong reliance on short-form visual content to capture attention. Themes like protest footage, testimonials, and symbolic visuals (candles, marches, banners) dominate the content. As shown in Table 3, the focus of content is women's rights, public safety and feminist activism. Themes include advocating for the Reclaim the Night movement, a focuses on gender-based violence, women's safety, and collective resistance. Additionally, the content showcases global solidarity protests, including Germany's 42 km march for RG Kar justice. Not only that, the Reclaim the Night movement resonates globally, so content tied to them often sees strong interactions (likes, comments, shares). The emotional nature of women's safety protests increases audience involvement and virality. Findings indicate that such content often motivates viewers to participate, amplify messages, and raise awareness. The use of slogans, empowering captions, and community participation strategies enhances the effect. However, it is difficult to discern how well this online activism leads to real-world action and societal change.

Impact of Visual Content
The protest at R G Kar Medical College highlights deep-seated concerns regarding institutional accountability, student safety, and administrative negligence. The protest serves as a microcosm of broader student-led movements advocating for justice, transparency, and safer educational environments. With social media amplifying their voices, the demonstrators are putting pressure on the administration to take concrete action. This thematic analysis explores the key dimensions of the protest, shedding light on its causes, implications, and potential outcomes.

Figure 5

Different Social Media Posters
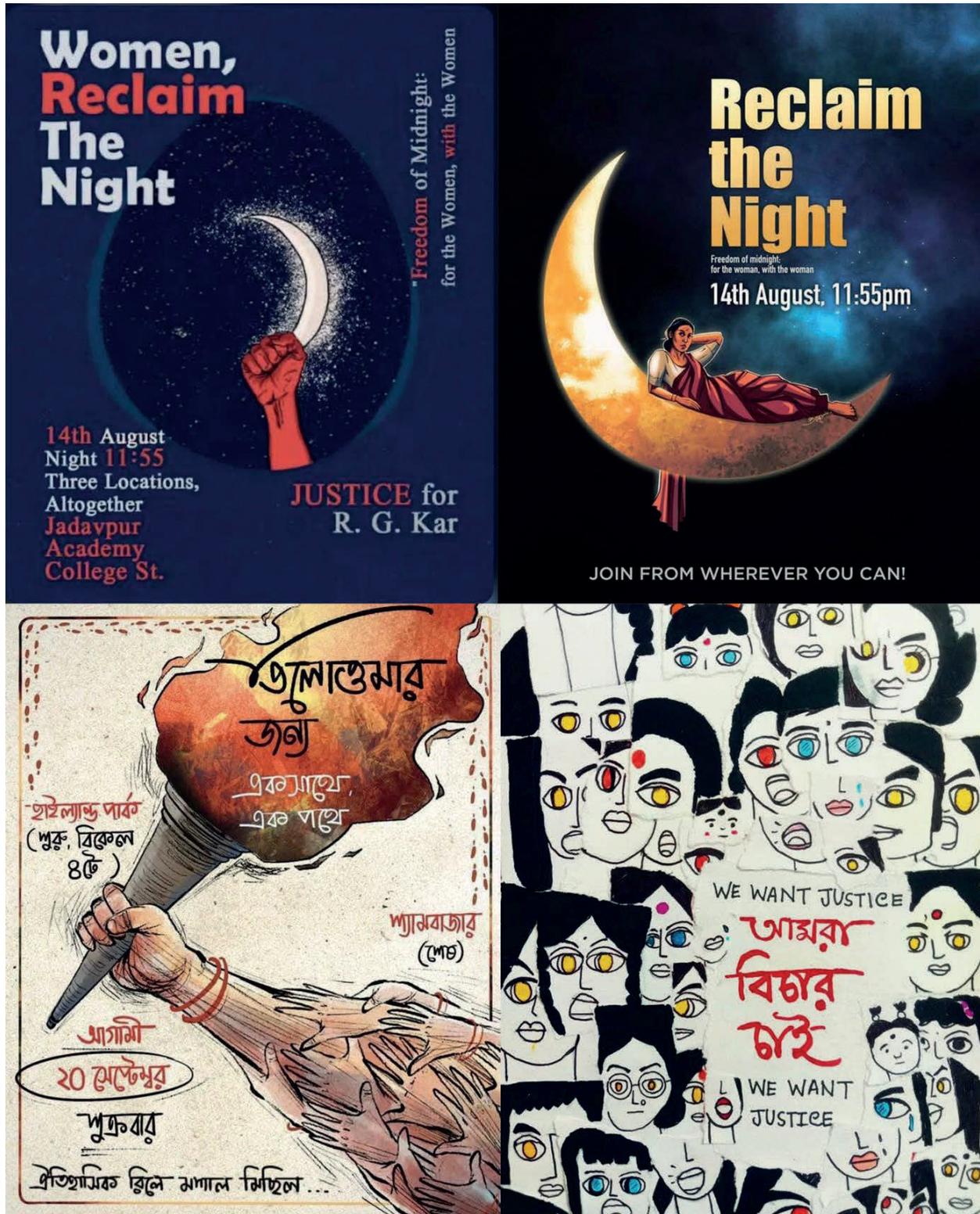
Note. Data Source: Facebook

Table 4

Thematic Analysis of Social Media Posters

Theme	Subthemes	Interpretation	Impact
Demand for justice & institutional accountability	-"We Want Justice" slogan - Protest targeting R G Kar administration - Call for legal/disciplinary action	Students are holding the college administration accountable, likely for mishandling a case of misconduct, harassment, or injustice.	Institutional reputation at risk; pressure on authorities to take action.
Student-led mobilization & resistance	- Medical students leading the protest - Internal campus movement - Student unity & solidarity	Students are organizing collectively to demand reforms, refusing to stay silent.	Strengthens student activism; potential for long-term policy changes.
Women's safety & gender justice	- Possible case of gender-based violence - Lack of institutional response to harassment - Campus safety concerns	If linked to women's safety, the protest aligns with broader feminist movements advocating for safer campuses.	May lead to policy discussions on gender-sensitive campus reforms.
Public vs. institutional narrative	- Social media & protest awareness - Administration's response (or lack thereof) - Scrutiny of educational institutions	The protest is shaping how the public perceives R G Kar's stance on student welfare and justice.	Increased media attention may escalate demands for action.

Analyse of the above posters in Figure 5 identifies some key takeaways, Students are demanding justice, particularly regarding institutional negligence (Table 4). The protest is gender sensitive, possibly linked to safety concerns. Social media and public discourse are amplifying the movement. R G Kar Medical College faces reputational risks unless corrective action is taken.

The protest at R G Kar Medical College signifies a crucial moment in student activism, institutional accountability, and gender safety on campus. It embodies a larger movement against negligence and impunity in educational institutions, highlighting student voices demanding justice.

Global Attention and Solidarity

The #JusticeForRGKar movement transcended regional boundaries, attracting international attention and solidarity. For instance, a peaceful gathering was held at Stadthausanlage in Zürich on August 29, 2024, where participants mourned the victim and demanded systemic changes to prevent such incidents in the future (Hope, 2024). In response to the incident, thousands of Indians living abroad organized protests in over 130 cities across 25 countries. These demonstrations began in regions such as Japan, Australia, Taiwan, and Singapore, eventually spreading to Europe and the United States. Participants demanded justice for the victim and called for improved safety measures for women in India. For instance, in the San Francisco Bay Area, hundreds gathered to form human chains, recite poems, and perform street theater, all emphasizing the need for accountability and safer environments for women. In Stockholm, Sweden, scores of women, dressed in black, assembled in Sergels Torg square, singing Bengali songs and holding signs to express their solidarity. These global protests underscore the pervasive concern over gender-based violence and the collective call for systemic change (Mukherjee & Roy, 2024).

News Media Verses Social Media Coverage

Social media platforms were instrumental in the rapid dissemination of information, personal stories, and calls to action, fueling the mobilization and amplifying the voices of participants. Meanwhile, mainstream media also played a significant role, albeit in a different way. Although traditional media outlets might not have initially covered the protests as extensively as social media, they eventually recognized the significance of the movement and leveraged social media themselves to share news and engage with the public. For instance, APB Ananda regularly shared reels and stories related to the Reclaim the Night events on their social media accounts. This demonstrates how traditional media outlets used social media to extend their reach and connect with audiences on these platforms. Furthermore, individual reporters from mainstream media houses utilized social media

platforms like Facebook and Instagram to provide live updates from the protest sites, often using their personal accounts or the official pages of their news organizations. This allowed for real-time reporting and a more immediate connection with the events on the ground, something traditional television broadcasting might not have been able to achieve simultaneously across multiple locations. Newspaper outlets like Ei Somoy (digital) and Sangbad Pratidin also covered the protests and shared live updates through their social media channels, including Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. This multi-platform approach highlights how both social media and traditional news outlets used each other's strengths to disseminate information and engage with the public regarding the RG Kar protests. Social media facilitated grassroots mobilization and immediate sharing of experiences. Mainstream media, even as they used social media, also provided a broader platform and potentially lent more credibility to the movement through their established channels.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The protest at R G Kar Medical College exemplifies the power of visual storytelling in capturing the complexities of activism, institutional accountability, and the struggle for justice. Through photographs documenting mass mobilization, symbolic messaging, confrontations with authorities, silent resistance, and the institutional backdrop, the protest's narrative is vividly constructed. Each visual element adds depth to the overarching themes of resistance, solidarity, and the demand for systemic change. Propelled by social media, the Reclaim the Night movement transcended physical boundaries, evolving into a globally recognized campaign for justice. Digital platforms facilitated rapid mobilization, ensuring that the protestors' voices reached beyond campus walls. Hashtags like #JusticeForRGKar, online communities, and global solidarity events underscore the role of digital activism in sustaining social movements.

The data show that social media significantly influenced public opinion, garnered support, and enabled collective action for the #JusticeForRGKar movement. The analysis identifies a prevalent "systemic injustice frame" in the social media discussions regarding the RG Kar incident. Posts consistently underscored the systemic problems of gender-based violence, workplace sexual harassment, and institutional failures, shifting focus from individual cases to the broader context. The data also reveal connections to a wider global movement advocating for gender justice and women's rights.

The public versus institutional narrative reveals tensions between student-led resistance and administrative responses, shaping public discourse and media representation. Impact of the movement extends beyond immediate demands, signaling a call for structural reforms in student welfare and gender-sensitive campus policies. As the movement persists, its legacy will be shaped by continued activism, media engagement, and policy interventions. The visual documentation of these events ensures that the struggle is preserved in collective memory, compelling authorities and the public to confront urgent issues. In this way, visual storytelling not only records history but also catalyzes change, reinforcing the enduring power of imagery in shaping socio-political landscapes.

Correspondence: Tanmay Samanta, Department of Mass Communication, St. Xavier's University, Kolkata, India.
bandhutanmay@gmail.com

References

Arowolo, S. O. (2017, March). Understanding framing theory. *Advanced theories in communication.* Lagos State University. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.25800.52482

Banerjee, A. (2024, August 14). *Kolkata horror. Why more RG Kar's will keep happening. Unless… SCAW* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yl6w6iNIfEk&t=13s

Benton, A. (2022, March 20). The origins and history of Reclaim the Night. *The Mancunion.* https://mancunion.com/2022/03/20/the-origins-and-history-of-reclaim-the-night/

Bhura, S. (2024, August 17). Night is ours too: Why women march to reclaim the streets. *The Times of India.* https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/night-is-ours-too-why-women-march-to-reclaim-the-streets/articleshow/112592089.cms

Biswas, S. S., & Das, S. (2024, August 25). *Reclaim the Night!* Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt (CADTM). https://www.cadtm.org/Reclaim-the-Night

Close, A. (2023, November 22). Reclaiming the Night, a guest post by Ajay Close. *Saraband.* https://saraband.net/2023/11/22/reclaiming-the-night-a-guest-post-by-ajay-close/

Das, S. (2024, August 30). The Reclaim the Night movement and the recent women's safety directives by the government. *Feminism in India.* https://feminisminindia.com/2024/08/30/the-reclaim-the-night-movement-and-the-recent-womens-safety-directives-by-the-government/

de, S. (2024, September 24). Justice for RG Kar. *Liberation.* https://liberation.org.in/liberation-2024-october/justice-rg-kar

Hope, B. (2024, September 3). Implement systemic and actionable changes in light of #JusticeForRGKar. *Change.org.* https://www.change.org/p/implement-systemic-and-actionable-changes-in-light-of-justiceforrgkar

HT News Desk. (2024, August 15). Who is Rimjhim Sinha, the woman behind "Reclaim the Night" campaign in Kolkata? *Hindustan Times.* https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/kolkata-rape-murder-reclaim-the-night-who-is-rimjhim-sinha-101723707110374.html?

HT News Desk. (2024, September 6). Kolkata rape-murder case: Another "Reclaim the Night" protest on September 8 in Bengal. *Hindustan Times.* https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/kolkata-rape-murder-case-another-reclaim-the-night-protest-on-september-8-in-bengal-101725640209390.html

Islam, R. (2024, August 17). *Khoto (ক্ষত) | Justice for RG Kar. Rupam Islam. Protest song* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mw8jhjl5-TQ

Joan. (1985). Take Back the Night Vancouver: 1978–1985 Herstory. *Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter.* https://rapereliefshelter.bc.ca/5127-2/

Jost, J. T., Barberá, P., Bonneau, R., Langer, M., Metzger, M., Nagler, J., Sterling, J., & Tucker, J. A. (2018). How social media facilitates political protest: Information, motivation, and social networks. *Political Psychology*, *39*(51), 85–118. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12478

Kharroub, T., & Bas, O. (2016). Social media and protests: An examination of Twitter images of the 2011 Egyptian revolution. *New Media & Society*, *18*(9), 1973–1992. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815571914

Liberation. (2024, August 25). Reclaim the Night and win the day: The battle for gender justice. *liberation.org.in.* https://liberation.org.in/liberation-2024-september/reclaim-night-and-win-day-battle-gender-justice

LiveMint. (2024, September 8). RG Kar rape case: Another "Reclaim the Night" march planned tonight in Kolkata. *Livemint.* https://www.livemint.com/news/india/rg-kar-rape-case-another-reclaim-the-night-march-planned-tonight-in-kolkata-10-things-to-know-11725756017142.html

Li, M., Turki, N., Izaguirre, C. R., DeMahy, C., Thibodeaux, B. L., & Gage, T. (2021). Twitter as a tool for social movement: An analysis of feminist activism on social media communities. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *49*(3), 854–868. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22324

Media Theory. (2023, September 3). Framing theory. Unveiling the power of media perception. https://mediatheory.net/framing-theory/

Menon, N. (2024, August 22). Freedom, not surveillance! Reclaim the Night Campaign Kolkata responds to measures suggested by the West Bengal government. *Kafila.* https://kafila.online/2024/08/22/freedom-not-surveillance-reclaim-the-night-campaign-kolkata-responds-to-measures-suggested-by-the-west-bengal-government/

Mukherjee, S., & Roy, A. (2024, September 9). Worldwide protests held over Indian trainee medic's rape and murder. *Reuters.* https://www.reuters.com/world/india/worldwide-protests-held-over-indian-trainee-medics-rape-death-2024-09-08/

NDTV. (2024, August 26). Kolkata doctor case. Voices from Kolkata: Working women on safety [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQ7Xnj8sXNg

Onuch, O. (2015). EuroMaidan protests in Ukraine: Social media versus social networks. *Problems of Post-Communism, 62*(4), 217–235. https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2015.103767 6

Pal, I. (2025, January 2). "Reclaim the Night" protest reminds us gender justice is still a far cry. *The Hindu.* https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/kolkata/reclaim-the-night-protest-reminds-us-gender-justice-is-still-far-cry/article69042418.ece

Rajput, N. (2024, August 27). Kolkata doctor case [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbE0fzZ2Nfo

Rathee, D. (2024, August 24). Kolkata case. Why is India so unsafe for women? [Video] YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqOg3h1onuM&t=824s

Scherman, A., Arriagada, A., & Valenzuela, S. (2015). Student and environmental protests in Chile: The role of social media. *Politics, 35*(2), 151–171. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12072

Singh, A. (2024, August 28). Aar kobe? Arijit Singh. Official lyrical video. Oriyon music [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/ZnQTfen-yTI

Singh, S. S. (2025, July 25). West Bengal Governor returns Aparajita Bill to state government for reconsideration. *The Hindu.* https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/west-bengal/west-bengal-governor-returns-aparajita-bill-to-state-govt-for-reconsideration/article69855000.ece

Thakur, G. (2024, August 21). Dark reality of RG Kar medical college exposed [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CS9bhf5ck

Treré, E. (2015). Reclaiming, proclaiming, and maintaining collective identity in the #YoSoy132 movement in Mexico: An examination of digital frontstage and backstage activism through social media and instant messaging platforms. *Information, Communication & Society, 18*(8), 901–915. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1043744

Vachhani, S. J. (2024). Networked feminism in a digital age: Mobilizing vulnerability and reconfiguring feminist politics in digital activism. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *31*(3), 1031–1048. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13097

Volkmer, I. (2009). Framing theory. In S. W. Littlejohn & K. A. Foss (Eds.), Encyclopedia of communication theory (pp. 408–409). SAGE Publications, Inc.

West Bengal Legislative Assembly. (2024). The Aparajita (Prevention of Sexual Violence and Protection of Women and Children) Bill, 2024 (Bill No. 14 of 2024). *PRS Legislative Research.* https://prsindia.org/files/bills_acts/bills_states/west-bengal/2024/Bill14of2024WB.pdf

Zamith, R. (2022). The American journalism handbook - Concepts, issues, and skills. *LibreTexts.* https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Communication/Journalism_and_Mass_Communication/The_American_Journalism_Handbook_-_Concepts_Issues_and_Skills_(Zamith)/02%3A_Media_Effects/2.02%3A_Framing_Theory