

Women's Safety in Public Spaces: Examining the Efficacy of Panic Buttons in New Delhi

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CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → *Interaction devices*.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: feminism, patriarchy, human computer interaction

ACM Reference Format:

Rishabh Devgon. 2020. Women's Safety in Public Spaces: Examining the Efficacy of Panic Buttons in New Delhi. In *ATHCC '21: ATHCC '21: Critical Review, January 19, 2021, New Delhi, IN*. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 2 pages.

1 CRITICAL REVIEW

The paper investigates the efficacy of panic buttons after the government mandated phone manufacturers to include them as a measure for women's safety while adopting the feminist HCI lens to analyse the data acquired [1][2]. The authors reflect on the factors that contribute to making a particular environment unsafe for women. They mention how addressing these issues becomes a cause of humiliation for those bringing it forward and how difficult it is to report instances because of the police's perception as partaking in harassment. The authors provide a comprehensive overview of various ICTs pertaining to women's safety and also explain the role of media perception.

The research is extremely important as it profoundly navigates through the context of women's safety in Delhi and provides recommendations for current and future initiatives. These recommendations could have a direct influence on the crimes against women and the conception of public safety. An aspect that I found particularly interesting was the practice of holding mobile phones to emulate connecting to social networks. An insight that emerged was that the panic button actually acts as a deterrent symbolically but becomes futile for more practical situations. This empowers women by creating an illusion of accountability for potential perpetrators.

The authors discuss the fact that the privilege of access to private means of transportation shields women from high-income households. Although, on the flip side, it also brings forward the vulnerability of the majority of women in India which in my opinion requires further dialogue within this research context. There were some severe limitations in the panic button including flaws in the form, misalignment with the conceptions held by women and lack of institutional support due to lack of focus on participation, pluralism and ecology respectively.

Adopting the feminist HCI lens is apt because of the power differences created between men and women and the systematic marginalisation of women in India due to its patriarchal preconditioning. Adopting the lens could reduce the conformed biases and critically review the research findings. The research methods that are used are surveys and semi-structured interviews which were later analysed through open coding and assigned various themes. These methods are apt for the purpose of this study because they help in providing qualitative and quantitative analysis for the research problem. However, a sample size of 30 for the survey seems insufficient to make the results generalisable. The

2020. Manuscript submitted to ACM

authors mention that the questions that they used for surveys and interviews were the same which creates redundancy and shortcomings because both research methods have different objectives and characteristics. I would have proposed ethnographic methods like contextual inquiry for the purpose of this study where the researchers could first-hand observe and question the subject's discomfort. The data acquired from the participants may also be suffering from recency bias given the heinous crime that happened in Delhi and the atmosphere and tension around it at that time. I observe in the sampling that the variations are only judged in terms of income, and no distinction has been specified as to education status, marital status, employment, caste, religion, race, sexual orientation. Adding these factors in the analysis could further strengthen the research by making it more robust. Moreover, an investigation on how the family dynamics correspond with the usage of smartphones especially in middle-income households may uncover new problems such as sharing of time on the phone among family members. Acknowledging these cultural and social factors would allow for more in-depth explorations about the relationship between women and ICTs concerned with women's public safety.

The research is novel because studies the public safety for women within Delhi and critically analyses the panic button through the feminist HCI lens. Since the study is based in Delhi, a complex metropolis with a high level of migration from all parts of India, the paper could have better situated itself towards investigating with a more diverse lens. In this study, I found it incredibly bizarre that there was no stress laid on ICTs that could actually help educate men and change their mindsets so that they do not attempt crimes against women. The aforementioned concern is related to the value of advocacy from Bardzell's feminist HCI lens that is severely lacking in this research. I felt that there was a lack of focus on the perpetrators themselves, but rather the paper reflected just on potential victims' preventative and coping mechanisms. The research can further address extended to domestic issues, patriarchal preconditioning and the formal education system and its reach, which can be seen as the major contributors to creating hostile spaces for women.

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