Experiences of Using Social Media Platforms: A Study of Transgender Individuals in the Urban Region of Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh

Kiran Badoni

ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to document the experiences of transgender individuals using social media platforms. While reporting these experiences, the paper also covers their demographic profiles, the roles of social media platforms, and the challenges transgender participants face while using these platforms. A total of 40 participants (20 transwomen and 20 hijras) were selected with the aid of a non-governmental organisation for personal interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule from the urban region of the Ghaziabad district, using purposive and snowball non-probability sampling techniques. The analysis involved descriptive statistics and thematic narrative analysis. Findings show that, out of the 40 transgender participants, 28 participants consisted of 46.43 per cent transwomen and 53.57 per cent hijra participants who fell within the 20–35 age range. Primary livelihood activities included sex work for transwomen and involvement in 'Badhai toli' for hijra participants. Participants often used social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Grindr. These social media platforms played a significant role in providing a platform for the declaration of self-identity, emotional and informational support, entertainment, and social causes. While the study centred around the positive aspects of social media use, it also brings to light the challenges they face in this digital space, such as misgendering, cyberbullying, and harassment. These issues emphasise the urgent need for enhanced online safety measures tailored to the specific needs of transgender individuals.

Author Details:
Kiran Badoni is Research Scholar, Department of Economics Studies and Planning, Central University of Karnataka, Kalaburagi and IPE-ICSSR Doctoral Fellow at Department of Management, Institute of Public Enterprise, Hyderabad, Email: badonikiran2020@gmail.com

I. INTRODUCTION

Overview of Social Media

Social media has recently become integral to a person's life and daily routine. Scholars argue that social media plays a significant role in contemporary life, with emerging adults spending approximately six hours daily on various online platforms (Vannucci et al., 2019). Social media refers to a "form of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) where users create online communities to share information, ideas, messages, and other content" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Approximately 4.7 billion individuals use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter—roughly 60 per cent of the world's population—to acquire and disseminate knowledge across diverse subjects (Kemp, 2023). In India, social media applications are utilised in education, healthcare, companies, entertainment, politics, agriculture, industry, communication, current affairs, and science and technology at low cost.

For instance, in political terms, social media allows politicians to run 'election campaigns' and interact with potential voters (Narasimhamurthy, 2014). In agriculture, Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube share information on various agricultural subsectors, such as "agriculture production, its management and marketing" (Thakur & Chander, 2018, pp. 1334-1346).

Social Media and LGBTIQA+Community

When referring to the 'LGBTIQA+' community, which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and asexual individuals, the addition of the '+' symbol to the LGBTQ acronym acknowledges the vast gender diversities not covered by the initial abbreviation (LGBTQIA Resource Center, n.d).

Background of Transgender Community

Within the LGBTQIA+ community, "transgender refers to individuals whose gender presentation differs from their biological sex" (American Psychological Association, 2018).Transgender serves as an umbrella term encompassing various gender identities, such as trans women, trans men, hijras, gender-neutral individuals, and queers (GLAAD, n.d).Transgender communities face widespread disparities across various aspects of their lives, including discrimination in education, healthcare, criminal justice, and both public and private settings (Grant et al., 2011). Additionally, findings from 'the largest U.S. national survey of transgender people to date' reveal that ninety per cent of trans individuals encounter harassment, mistreatment, or discrimination in the workplace, resulting in unemployment rates double that of the general population and a poverty rate four times higher than that of the general population (U.S. Transgender Survey, 2015).

Transgender individuals turn to social media platforms in their pursuit of social support and acceptance. Cavalcante (2017) discusses in his study, 'I Did It All Online: Transgender Identity and the Management of Everyday Life,' how online platforms offer a safe space for transgender individuals to explore, express, and affirm their identities, build communities, and access information, support, and

resources that may not be readily available offline. This online engagement profoundly impacts their overall well-being (Cavalcante, 2017). Furthermore, for transgender individuals grappling with anxiety and depression, social media provides a secure environment that helps alleviate perceived threats and enhances coping mechanisms, thereby serving as a protective factor for mental health (Budge et al., 2013). Social media platforms also offer emotional and social support, as reported by transgender adolescents, facilitating connections with others who share similar experiences and fostering a sense of community and belonging. This online interaction mitigates feelings of isolation and offers a platform for self-expression (Selkie et al., 2020).

In addition to the positive role of social media, transgender individuals often encounter cyberbullying, also known as 'social media harassment', which involves the use of digital platforms for "harassment, stalking, intimidation, or humiliation" (Patchin & Hinduja, 2015, pp. 69-74). Haimson et al. (2020) emphasise the necessity for safety and security measures, privacy protections, and content warnings on transgender-focused social media platforms to safeguard the well-being of transgender individuals (Haimson et al., 2020).

Background of Transgender Community in India with Special Reference to Uttar Pradesh

In the Indian context, the transgender population was counted for the first time in the Census of India in 2011, where transgender individuals were designated separately from the male and female populations under the category designated as 'Others'(Census of India, 2011).   Later, after the enactment of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) Act in 2014, transgender individuals were recognised as the 'third gender' in India (Jha, 2014). Since this study focuses only on transwomen and hijras, it is essential to define each. A transwoman is described as a woman assigned male at birth. In simple terms, a transwoman refers to "an individual who is male by birth but identifies their gender characteristics as female" (Wilkins et al., 2022, pp.540-549), whereas 'hijra' is defined as "male-born individuals who were neither men nor women; they are born as males and through a ritual surgical transformation become an alternative, third sex/gender category. Hijras form a culturally unique gender group following a *'Guru'* and *'Chela'* hierarchy" (Herdt, 1991, pp. 199-200).

Although several studies in India have revealed that some transwomen and intersex individuals fall within and without sex reassignment surgery (SRS) under the hijra cult (Agrawal, 1997), now the question arises: Who is intersex? Intersex individuals also fall under the hijra community. In simple language, "intersex refers to those people who are born with sex characteristics (such as sexual anatomy, reproductive organs, hormonal patterns, and chromosomal patterns) that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies" (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2015).

Researchers have provided a brief description of the status of transgender people in India to understand this population. In India, transgender people belong to the marginalised community. They face extreme gender discrimination, such as unequal and inadequate educational opportunities; transgender people are mostly illiterate or less educated (More, 2021). Due to discrimination in healthcare centres, they encounter challenges in accessing health services. The majority of them are

victims of severe mental health issues (Pandya & Redcay, 2021). They also encounter difficulties in finding employment and shelter. In general, transgender individuals face struggles within their families. Transgender individuals are often rejected by their biological families for being transgender (Hotchandani, 2017). Since they are different from cisgender individuals, who are usually defined as "individuals whose gender identity and gender expression align with the sex assigned at birth" (American Psychological Association, 2018, p.32).

Researchers have indicated that similar findings on the status of transgender individuals are applicable in the context of the transgender population residing in Uttar Pradesh.

Usage of Social Media in India with Special Reference to Uttar Pradesh

Researchers have attempted to explore social media usage among people residing in Uttar Pradesh. They found a single study in the educational landscape where students and educators leverage social media platforms to share resources, enhance learning, and facilitate communication in building academic relationships (Raut & Patil, 2016).

Transgender and Social Media in India with Special Reference to Uttar Pradesh

Researchers have also endeavoured to investigate the impact of social media on the lives of transgender individuals. However, they found only one study conducted by Irudayaraj (2020) in Tamil Nadu, which elucidates that transgender persons often face discrimination, humiliation, and isolation in the physical world. Social media offers them a free and secure online space to form communities, exchange information, and express their identities. Examples of such groups include "Trans Employment," "Born2win," and "Trans Resource Centre," among others (Irudayaraj, 2020, pp. 2314-2516).

Since limited research exists on the correlation between transgender individuals and social media in India, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, considerable attention has been directed towards the broader intersection of social media and transgender individuals in Uttar Pradesh. Based on empirical evidence and field surveys conducted in Ghaziabad, a significant research gap has been identified regarding the experiences of transgender individuals on various social media platforms in the locality.

In this context, the present study aims to address the research gap in scholarly literature concerning transgender individuals and social media, focusing specifically on the urban region of Ghaziabad. The study seeks to uncover the most commonly used apps by transgender individuals and explore the role of social media while shedding light on the challenges they face when accessing social media platforms.

II. METHODOLOGY

The present study is descriptive and exploratory and follows a mixed research methodology with qualitative and quantitative data.

Descriptive research presented the characteristics of transgender individuals (demographic profile) and what social media platforms they use, for example, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc., while exploring the role of social media in transgender life and what are the challenges experienced by transgender individuals at various social media platforms are considered an exploratory research endeavour in Uttar Pradesh.

Researchers have selected Uttar Pradesh state in India based on a census of India last held in 2011. As per the Census of India, 2011, in India, the transgender population is estimated at 487,803, with a literacy rate of 56.07 per cent. They are indicating that there are 54,854 transgender children in the age group of 0–6 years. Furthermore, 78,811 transgender individuals belong to scheduled castes, and 33,293 belong to scheduled tribes. At the state level, Uttar Pradesh has the most prominent transgender population, comprising 137,465 individuals with 55.80 per cent literacy. Additionally, 18,734 transgender children are under the 0–6 years age group. Moreover, 26,404 transgender individuals are from scheduled castes, with the absence of any single transgender under scheduled tribes (Census of India, 2011).

Given the lack of governmental data on transgender populations at the capital, block, tehsil, city, or village levels, except for information at the state and union territory levels, employing purposive sampling with a snowball non-random sampling strategy, transgender individuals in the urban Ghaziabad district within the Meerut division were chosen for examination (where famous transgender social media influencers and their community reside according to information shared through personal blogs and YouTube channels).

To facilitate data collection, a researcher approached several non-governmental organisations dedicated to the LGBTQ+ population in the Meerut division, particularly in Noida (Gautam Buddha District) and Ghaziabad district. With the aid of NGOs, 40 participants who used social media frequently, i.e., (20 transwomen and 20 hijras) were selected.

For this study, mixed data (both qualitative and quantitative data) was collected using two different techniques:

- Quantitative data: It involves numerical information that can be measured and analysed statistically, such as counts, frequencies, percentages, and measurements.

- Qualitative data: It provides insights into attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and behaviours. This information was collected through personal interviews using semi-structured open-ended questions, observations, or interview schedules.

In the present study, data analysis has two components based on the nature of the data:

- Quantitative data analysis: For quantitative data, descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution and percentages are computed using SPSS software.

- Qualitative data analysis: For quantitative data, researchers have used NVivo software for narrative and thematic analysis, where themes and codes from interviews are framed.

III. ANALYSIS

Demographic Profile of self-identified transgender participants

The researcher integrated the demographic profile of transgender individuals, emphasising critical aspects such as transgender identities, age, education, livelihood activities, and income.

Table-1: List of Self-identified Transgender Individuals

Self-identified Transgender Individuals	Frequency	Percentage
Transwoman	20	50.00%
Hijra	20	50.00%
Total	40	100.00%

Source: Field Survey, 2023-2024
Note: Researchers have calculated column-wise percentages for better understanding

Table-1 depicts that, out of 40 self-identified transgender participants, 20 were transwomen, and 20 were hijra. As a proportion, there were 50 per cent were transwomen, and 50 per cent were hijra (including intersex and transwomen following the hijra cult), showing an equal representation of two categories of gender identities among the transgender participants.

Table-2: Age Group of Transgender Individuals

Age Group	Transwomen	Hijra	Total
Young adults (20-35 years old)	13 (46.43%)	15(53.57%)	28
Middle-age adults (36-55 years old)	7 (63.64%)	4 (36.36%)	11
Older Adults (>55 years old)	Nil	1 (100%)	1
Total	20	20	40

Source: Field Survey, 2023-2024
Note: Researchers have calculated row-wise percentages for better understanding

Table-2 depicts the distribution of 40 self-identified transgender individuals across different age groups in Ghaziabad. The majority fell within the 20-35 age group, comprising 46.43 per cent of transwomen and 53.57 per cent of hijra, indicating the largest age group where hijra participants have slightly higher representation than transwomen.

The 36-55 age group included 63.64 per cent of transwomen and 36.36 per cent of hijra, comparatively lesser in proportion to young adults. In contrast, the older adults (>55 years old) category shows a low representation of participants with a single hijra participant.

Table-3: Education Status among Transgender Individuals

Education status	Transwomen	Hijra	Total
Illiterate	4 (28.57%)	10 (71.43%)	14
Primary/Elementary School (1st -5th grade)	3 (50%)	3 (50%)	6
Upper Primary/Secondary School (6th-9th grade)	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	4
Matriculation (10th grade)	4 (66.67%)	2 (33.33%)	6
Intermediate (12th grade)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	2
Graduation (3/4 years)	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	5
Post-graduation (2 years)	2 (66.67%)	1 (33.33%)	3
Total	20	20	40

Source: Field Survey, 2023-2024
Note: Researchers have calculated row-wise percentages for better understanding

Table-3 depicts the educational background of 40 transgender individuals in Ghaziabad. Among the participants, 14 were illiterate, comprising 28.57 per cent of transwomen and 71.43 per cent of hijra. Transwomen exhibited varying academic levels, with a high per cent (66.67%) having completed matriculation (10th grade), followed by various degrees of schooling. For hijra, 10 per cent were illiterate, while others had completed education levels ranging from elementary school to post-graduation. Additionally, 10 per cent of transwomen and 5 per cent of hijra participants held post-graduate degrees. This table indicates disparities and equalities in transgender educational levels. An equal percentage of participants reported similar education primary (1st-5th grade) and intermediate (12th grade) qualifications. In contrast, disparities among participants are seen in other education levels.

Table-4: Livelihood Activities among Transgender Individuals

Livelihood Activity	Transwomen	Hijra	Total
Private Sector	2 (100%)	Nil	2
Government Sector	1 (100%)	Nil	1
Sex Work	6 (75%)	2 (25%)	8
Badhai Toli	Nil	8 (100%)	8
Begging	Nil	6 (100%)	6
Beautician	2 (100%)	Nil	2
Student	2 (100%)	Nil	2
Unemployed	4 (66.67%)	2 (33.33%)	6
NGOs	2 (100%)	Nil	2
YouTuber/Social influencer	1 (33.33%)	2 (66.67%)	3
Total	20	20	40

Source: Field Survey, 2023-2024
Note: Researchers have calculated row-wise percentages for better understanding

Table-4 depicts the livelihood activities among transgender individuals. Out of 40 total participants, 66.67 per cent of transwomen and 33.33 per cent of hijra were unemployed.

The majority of transwomen engage in sex work as their primary source of income, with 75 per cent of transwomen and 25 per cent of hijra participants involved in this livelihood activity. For eight hijras, the primary sources of income were *'badhai toli',* and for six hijras, begging. Notably, one hijra participant provided insight into *'badhai toli,'* describing it as a group of hijra participants performing, dancing, and singing at special events such as marriages, the birth of a newborn, festivals and other occasions. Moreover, 66.67 per cent of hijra participants and 33.33 per cent of transwomen were unemployed. In contrast, 33.33 per cent of transwomen and 66.67 per cent of hijra participants worked as social media influencers or YouTubers. Only one transwoman was employed in the government sector. Only two transwomen were employed in NGOs; two were working as beauticians, two were students, and two were working in the private sector.

Table-5: Monthly Income Level among Transgender Individuals

Monthly income in Rs.	Transwomen	Hijra	Total
5000-10000	3 (33.33%)	6 (66.67%)	9
11000-15000	7 (63.64%)	4 (36.36%)	11
16000-20000	2 (40%)	3 (60%)	5
Above 20000	8 (53.33%)	7 (46.67%)	15
Total	20	20	40

Source: Field Survey, 2023-2024
Note: Researchers have calculated row-wise percentages for better understanding

Table-5 depicts the monthly income distribution of transgender individuals across different income brackets. The table shows that out of 40 participants, 33.33 per cent of transwomen and 66.7 per cent of hijras were earning between Rs 5000-10000 income group. Comparatively, hijra participants are more prevalent in low-income brackets than transwomen. This is due to differences in their livelihood activities, as mentioned in Table 4, because eleven out of 40 participants earned Rs 11000-15000. It includes 63.64 per cent of transwomen and 36.36 per cent of hijra participants, whereas 40 per cent of transwomen and 60 per cent of hijra participants were earning in the second largest income group of Rs 16000-20000.

Among the 15 individuals out of 40 participants, 53.33 per cent of transwomen and 35 per cent of hijra participants reported earnings above 20,000, showing that a significant percentage of participants accessed relatively more earning opportunities. Comparatively, to hijras, transwomen are found more in the higher income brackets. The disparities in the income of both the participants have been seen.

Social Media Usage among Transgender Individuals

Table-6 depicts the prevalence of social media platforms among transgender individuals residing in the urban region of Ghaziabad, with sub-headings as follows:

Facebook

Out of the total 40 participants, 55.56 per cent of transwomen and 44.44 per cent of hijras belonging to different age-group ranging from 20 years to above 55 years (see Table 2) frequently used Facebook for various purposes, including creating profiles, uploading posts, images, and videos, and sending messages.

Snapchat

The usability of Snapchat among transgender individuals decreases with age. Many hijra participants expressed awareness of Snapchat, but some found it unsuitable due to age, tastes and preferences, purpose of use or knowledge limitations. In the age group of 36–55 years, transwomen using Snapchat apps have diminished. Additionally, of the 63.64 per cent of transwomen in the age group of 36-55 years (see Table 2 for reference), only four were Snapchat users (see the above Table).

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is "considered a business-oriented social networking site highlighting the significance of professional networks with the tagline relationships matter" (Sorensen, 2009, pp. 427-431). Researchers found that only three transwomen out of 40 participants used LinkedIn for job searching and professional networking. None of the hijra participants used LinkedIn.

A 24-year-old hijra participant said:
"My main source of income is begging; others engage in "badahi toli." We do not need LinkedIn for job searching and professional networking."

YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp

The study showed that YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp are the most commonly used social media platforms among participants. They mainly use these platforms to watch videos and reels. Some also mentioned using Instagram to record and upload their reels, YouTube for songs and videos, and WhatsApp to send messages and discuss news, videos, and audio with others online.

Grindr and Bumble

Grindr and Bumble are the two most common dating apps used by transgender individuals. Out of the 40 participants, 26 used Grindr, consisting of 53.85 per cent transwomen and 46.15 per cent hijra participants. On the other hand, only two transwomen used the Bumble app, and none of the hijra participants reported its usage.

Telegram

Usage of Telegram was reported as the least among transgender individuals. Only one transwoman used it for file sharing and forming groups.

Table-6: Social Media Platforms Used by Transgender Individuals

Social Media Platforms	Transwomen	Hijra	Total
Facebook	20 (55.56%)	16 (44.44%)	36
Snapchat	4 (100%)	Nil	4
LinkedIn	3 (100%)	Nil	3
YouTube	20 (50%)	20 (50%)	40
WhatsApp	20 (50%)	20 (50%)	40
Grindr	14 (53.85%)	12 (46.15%)	26
Bumble	2 (100%)	Nil	2
Telegram	1 (100%)	Nil	1
Instagram	20 (50%)	20 (50%)	40
Total	20	20	40

Source: Field Survey, 2023-2024
Note: Researchers have calculated row-wise percentages for better understanding

Role of Social Media in Transgender Individual's Lives

Table-7: *Role of Social Media in Transgender Individuals' Lives*

Roles	Transwomen	Hijra	Total
Declaration of Self-identity	20 (50%)	20 (50%)	40
Emotional Support	20 (50%)	20 (50%)	40
Informational Support	20 (50%)	20 (50%)	40
Social Cause	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	4
Entertainment Purposes	20 (50%)	20 (50%)	40
Total	20	20	40

Source: Field survey, 2023-2024
Note: The Researchers have received the same responses except for social causes.
Informational support includes information on various topics such as education, health, business, employment, housing, political and legal matters and government initiatives

Table-7 depicts the role of social media in Transgender individuals residing in the urban region of Ghaziabad, with sub-headings as follows.

Declaration of Self-Identity

Social media provide a digital space where transgender individuals can express what they feel, which helps in identifying and exploring themselves.

As one hijra participant narrated:

> *"Despite that, I have a fear inside me of being harassed online and feeling isolated; I feel social media have given me a virtual public space where I am exploring my sexual identities and have some mental well-being."*

JSDC   Badoni (2024)

Similarly, a 26-year-old transwoman recalling her old memories said:

> *"I, myself, even being extroverted, bold, and independent, came out as a transwoman online first and then expressed what I feel about my identity to my closest friends; I wish I could have expressed myself to my friends and teachers during my school days. However, I feel I can do it now after using social media. However, it is incredibly contradictory online because it is so impersonal and personal at the same time. Nevertheless, I seem to be seen as a guy online, and if I can do that here, then I can do it in school, at home, and in other areas that affect my life."*

According to all transgender participants, social media creates a unique, new, easily accessible, and more dynamic landscape for the development of identities. Transgender participants claim that using social media platforms increases cooperation and community involvement. Transgender individuals have the option to communicate with the public through the use of various social media platforms rather than solely with members of their community.

Emotional Support

The researchers mentioned some global studies on social media and emotional support. According to these studies, social media provides emotional support, especially to those transgender individuals who do not feel understood by others in the real world and also to those who experience a lack of understanding from cisgender peers.

This present study shows that participants have shared similar experiences. A transwoman participant stated:

> *"We use social media to reduce stress; we transgender individuals use social media to try to escape the situation as the real world is more insensitive."*

Sharing her experiences, a 42-year-old hijra participant claimed:

> *"During the COVID-19 pandemic, my online family supported me financially, mentally, and emotionally. I was in Mumbai to meet my community members; during that time, the government imposed a lockdown and maintaining social distance was compulsory…; even though they were strangers to me, many of my friends, whom I had not yet met, helped me financially."*

Informational Support

Most participants mentioned that they receive information about sex reassignment surgery and online beauty parlour courses from social media platforms.

A 34-years-old transwomen participant said:

> *"Through social media, I got information on various government initiatives taken for transgender welfare, such as the "Transgender*

Certificate." Some relate to their employment, education, rehabilitation centres, healthcare facilities, and reservation policies. I got to know about the free-shelter-home (Garima Greh) for transgender in Delhi through Facebook."

Social Cause

According to five transwomen participants, they have used social media platforms in the past to promote awareness about transgender individuals, their lifestyles, and societal causes. Additionally, two hijra participants claimed to be social activists who run social campaigns and awareness programs with the aid of NGOs for the welfare of the transgender community.

Entertainment Purposes
Regarding entertainment purposes, all 40 participants used social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for entertainment.

A 36-year-old famous hijra participant, a transgender influencer, stated:

"I started my YouTube channel for enjoyment, uploading prank videos and aiming to increase the number of followers, subscribers, and likes on my videos, which provides YouTube as a source of income."

Another 26-year-old transwoman mentioned:

"I upload reels, dance videos, makeup tutorials, and endorse beauty products on Instagram."

Challenges of Using Social Media

Table-8: Challenges Faced by Transgender Individuals Using Social Media Platforms

Challenges	Transwomen	Hijra	Total
Misgendering and Dead Naming	20 (50%)	20 (50%)	40
Cyber Bullying and Harassment	17 (45.95%)	20 (54.05%)	37
Privacy Concerns	7 (35%)	13 (65%)	20
Educational Gaps	18 (51.43%)	17 (48.57%)	35
Underrepresentation	9 (42.86%)	12 (57.14%)	21

Source: Field Survey, 2023-2024

Table-8 depicts the challenges faced by transgender individuals using social media platforms residing in the urban region of Ghaziabad, with sub-headings as follows:

Misgendering and Dead Naming

All 40 participants stated that misgendering, the use of pronouns inconsistent with a transgender person's identity, remained a prevalent issue on social media platforms. They have shared several incidents where they have received comments

and messages on platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, often attacking their chosen identities.

One participant commented:

> *"Referring to my biological name as my 'dead name' challenged my identity as a transwoman. It reminded me of what I was, casting doubt on my new identity."*

Cyber Bullying and Harassment

Out of 40 participants, 45.95 per cent of hijra and 54.05 per cent of transwomen participants reported facing cyberbullying. Instances of catfishing, fake profiles, and image manipulation were common.

A 24-years-old transwoman said:

> *"They frequently found their images on sexual and pornographic websites, experiencing trolling, flaming, and harassment. Some people use derogatory comments for them."*

Privacy Concerns

Thirty-five per cent of transwomen participants expressed concerns about privacy on LGBTQ+ community-only social media, whereas 65 per cent of hijra participants perceived sharing news, photos, or videos with cisgender individuals as a potential threat to privacy due to the risk of misuse.

Educational Gaps

As reported by 51.43 per cent of transwomen and 48.57 per cent of hijra participants, gaps in public education exist, with public perceptions demonstrating a lack of familiarity and understanding of transgender individuals. Insensitive remarks, such as being labelled *"half-purush"* and *"half-Mahila,"* imply being neither male nor female but a mixture of both. This highlights the need for increased awareness and education about transgender experiences.

Underrepresentation

Out of 40 participants, 21 participants, including 42.86 per cent of transwomen and 57.14 per cent of hijras, had raised concerns about the underrepresentation of the transgender community on social media. One participant noted that while films like *'Haddi'* and *'Taali'* have brought attention to transgender identities, the portrayal on social media often leans towards amusement and entertainment rather than providing a comprehensive understanding.

In summary, the researchers have captured the statement of a 34-years-old hijra participant, who said:

> *"The public should recognise that transgender community have severe social media risks being uneducated or less educated, unfamiliar with digital knowledge, victim to depression comparatively to cisgender."*

Discussion

The present study addressed transgender individuals who are using various social media platforms. The authors used a semi-structured interview schedule for data collection. Interviews were conducted with transgender individuals who have accounts on different social media platforms. The study revealed that transgender individuals strategically leverage social media to express their trans identity by curating their networks and content. However, the study also found a pattern of decline in the use of platforms such as Snapchat with an increase in the age of participants. Furthermore, the study attempted to identify positive correlations between education, income, and the use of social media. It is argued that social media use increases as education and household income increase. Transgender individuals with higher incomes have more robust social networks and community involvement. Those with higher levels of education often use social media platforms for job exploration and online work-related communication.

There is a prevalent pattern of the use of dating apps among the participants, particularly among transwomen. It is reported that the majority of transgender participants use dating apps and messaging apps, such as Grindr and Bumble and WhatsApp and Instagram, several times a day. They use Instagram to connect with community members and create humorous videos and trending reels for entertainment. The commercialisation of beauty products and other information also attracts transgender individuals to use Instagram. They strongly desire to gain more likes, comments, and followers on their social media platforms.

Moreover, transgender individuals who are active on social media face associated challenges, including cyberbullying and the uploading of their images on pornographic sites. The primary factor that plays a crucial role in using different social media platforms is the desire of transgender individuals for social acceptance. During interviews, transgender individuals commented that they use social media as a platform to seek emotional support and social acceptability. Many participants exclusively present their transgender identity through social media.

IV. CONCLUSION

The present study has highlighted social media's diverse experiences, challenges, and roles in transgender individuals' day-to-day lives. Social media emerges as a vital platform, offering avenues for the declaration of self-identity, social networking, emotional support and entertainment purposes. The social media platforms favoured by transgender individuals include YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp, followed by Facebook and Grindr. In contrast, Snapchat is less favourable due to age, tastes and preferences, purpose of use or knowledge limitations. While the study centred around the positive aspects of social media use, it also brings to light the challenges these individuals face in this digital space. Issues such as misgendering, dead naming, cyberbullying, and privacy concerns are exposed, emphasising the urgent need for enhanced online safety measures tailored to the specific needs of transgender individuals.

Limitations

Purposive and snowball non-probability sampling was used, and this study was conducted in the urban region of Ghaziabad. Sampling biases may exist due to the focus on the urban region of Ghaziabad, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to other parts of Ghaziabad and Uttar Pradesh. To mitigate, as an extension of this research, future work should be conducted.

Recommendations

The study provides significant recommendations based on the findings.

- The most crucial is a collaboration with LGBTQ+ organisations such as 'Alliance,' 'Humsafar Trust,' and human rights groups to enhance awareness regarding issues faced by transgender individuals and other nonbinary identities, support victims, and participate in advocacy initiatives.
- Promoting digital literacy and fostering appropriate online behaviour through user education programs is crucial.
- Educating users on respectful communication, empathy, and the detrimental effects of hate speech on individuals is essential.
- Law enforcement agencies should address significant instances of internet harassment and hate speech against transgender individuals more effectively and fairly.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

VI. NOTES

The researchers have used terms like trans community, trans people, transgender community, transgender people, transgender individuals, and transgender participants to represent the 'transgender.' LGBQT+ community and LGBQT+ people have been used interchangeably. Researchers have used the word transgender participants or participants instead of transgender individuals in some places for the most straightforward understanding.

VII. REFERENCES

American Psychological Association. (2018). Defining transgender terms. *Monitor on Psychology, 49*(8), 32.

Budge, S. L., Adelson, J. L., & Howard, K. A. (2013). Anxiety and depression in transgender individuals: The roles of transition status, loss, social support, and coping. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *81*(3), 545.

Cavalcante, A. (2017). "I Did It All Online:" Transgender identity and the management of everyday life. In *Queer Technologies* (pp. 109–122). Routledge.

Chandramouli, C., & General, R. (2011). Census of india 2011. *Provisional Population Totals. New Delhi: Government of India*, 409–413.

GLAAD. (n.d.). Transgender FAQ. https://www.glaad.org/transgender/transfaq

Grant, J. M., Mottet, L. A., Tanis, J., & Min, D. (2011). Transgender discrimination survey. *National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force: Washington, DC, USA*.

Haimson, O. L., Buss, J., Weinger, Z., Starks, D. L., Gorrell, D., & Baron, B. S. (2020). Trans time: Safety, privacy, and content warnings on a transgender-specific social media site. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, *4*(CSCW2), 1–27.

Herdt, G. (1991). Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India . *Serena Nanda. American Anthropologist*, *93*(1), 199–200. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1991.93.1.02a00420

Hotchandani, K. R. (2017). Problems of transgender in India: A study from social exclusion to social inclusion. *International Research Journal of Human Resources and Social Sciences*, *4*(4), 73–79.

Irudayaraj, A. A. (2020). *Making the invisible visible: The instrumental role social media in the recognition and affirmation of identity and rights of transgender persons in Tamil Nadu* (2516–2314). Easy Chair.

Jha, E. (2014). NALSA v. Union of India-The Metamorphosis of Gender Recognition in India. *CALJ*, pp. *2*, 48.

Kemp, S. (2023). Digital 2023: Global Overview Report. DataReportal. Retrieved from https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-global-overview-report

LGBTQIA Resource Center. (n.d.). LGBTQIA Resources. University of California, Davis. https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/resources

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Social media. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20media

More, V. (2021). Problems of transgender community in India: A sociological study. *Vivek Research Journal*, pp. 87–94.

Narasimhamurthy, N. (2014). Use and rise of social media as election campaign medium in India. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies*, *1*(8), 202–209.

Patchin, J. W., & Hinduja, S. (2015). Measuring cyberbullying: Implications for research. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, pp. *23*, 69–74.

Raut, V., & Patil, P. (2016). Use of Social Media in Education: Positive and Negative impact on the students. *International Journal on Recent and Innovation Trends in Computing and Communication*, *4*(1), 281–285.

Selkie, E., Adkins, V., Masters, E., Bajpai, A., & Shumer, D. (2020). Transgender adolescents' uses of social media for social support. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *66*(3), 275–280.

Thakur, D., & Chander, M. (2018). Use of social media in agricultural extension: Some evidences from India. *International Journal of Science, Environment and Technology*, *7*(4), 1334–1346.

U.S. Transgender Survey. (2015). National Center for Transgender Equality. Retrieved from https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/USTS-Full-Report-FINAL.PDF

Vannucci, A., Ohannessian, C. M., & Gagnon, S. (2019). Use of multiple social media platforms in relation to psychological functioning in emerging adults. *Emerging Adulthood*, *7*(6), 501–506.

Wilkins, N. J., Rasberry, C., Liddon, N., Szucs, L. E., Johns, M., Leonard, S., Goss, S. J., & Oglesby, H. (2022). Addressing HIV/Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Pregnancy Prevention Through Schools: An Approach for Strengthening Education, Health Services, and School Environments That Promote Adolescent Sexual Health and Well-Being. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *70*(4), 540–549. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.05.017