# Role of digital space in Gender Performance : Construction of a Social Identity

Kirti Kumari

*Gargi College*

*University of Delhi, New Delhi, India*

*E-mail address- kirtikumari467@gmail.com*

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**Abstract**

Social media and gender have been one of the important topics of discussion in debates societies. Gender has been a traditional concept and social media is a very 20th-century idea but the thought of both of these concepts together accelerated in modern world with the introduction of industrialization and new social media. It became a sacred space curated specially to give you the freedom to have different versions of yourself where the reality can be found hidden behind the cameras and the ideal reality one want to show is presented itself in front of the world. Here we will be focusing on how genders are represented on social media and most importantly how these constructed identities are perceived by society. Furthermore, we will be examining the representation of genders in movies, media, and television and how they perpetuate various stereotypes and gendered norms which affect them in the real world.

Gender and traditional demarcation of its characteristics are usually based on behaviour, language basically, all the concepts which can be fundamentally constructed. The idea of Judith butler of gender performance becomes the origin of discussion on the categorization of genders. In the modern world, the lines strictly drawn to keep everyone in their area is blurring with the discovery of many genders and sexuality and this has been propagated by social media as it facilitates the connection between individuals with similar experiences and also becomes the platform for all gender voices to be heard. This paper will also discuss the opportunities and challenges faced by people according to their gender and also how the same social media becomes the medium of self-expression and space where they fight the misconceptions, stereotypes, and power hierarchy associated with their gender.

**INTRODUCTION**

Research conducted in the area of social media usage all conclude towards the mass utilization of social media.  Reports suggest that young adults are communicating and building relationships online, more than via face-to-face communication (Velten and Arif, 2016). So the idea of digital space in the construction of your social identity plays a very crucial role. If we see the purpose of using the social media then Men in general use the platform to represent their work and establish their work place connections with the related field and use it mostly for the representation of their work or to make connections. For women and LGBTQA+ groups however, digital spaces becomes sacred space where they communicate to form a social bond, companionship, representation of their Ideas and thoughts without meeting in person. More importantly to raise their voice which was Until now, kept in shadows by society. New social platforms unlike traditional media creates a two-way communication between the general society and the repressed group. Where as in the traditional means like newspapers, and movies people would only consume the portrayed idea of a conventional and happy man, a sterilized image that would please all sections of

society as well as propagate a uniformity in nature and try to fit in with the society's facade, suppressing the inner self.

In new age of social media we have the freedom to challenge and create counter-Discourse. Thus, the wrongs of the society which were unspoken and unheard are becoming right. The new social media age is liberating comment on the suppressive nature of the gender and sexual politics as it provides an opportunity for different genders to break the glass ceiling, challenge the stereotypes and gender norms which were created in an era of no free- space to talk and have been continuing in modern society by the virtue of archaic laws.

However, Social media has done goods but everything has its flaws as well, almost balancing the positives is the negative outlook men and women have upon themselves when fed with the ideals through the algorithm of social media. The portrayal of having an ideal body type, fashion, makeup and even the stereotypes of what constitutes to be a man and woman and deviating from these gendered norms introduces you to new forms of social criticism, which is anonymous, through trolling, body shaming, money shaming and other such morally and mentally challenging taunts. People who appear on screen pretend to be somewhat perfect people without any problems in life and the person who is behind the screen consuming the content and tries to match his or her life to that ideal representation and fails then they feel unworthy, unwanted and useless. People try to portray and match the persona lifestyle, one which has no problems and thus influencing others to follow suit and creating trends of facade which leads to social media depression which is common in all genders. Oscar Ybarra, a psychology professor at Michigan University comments on the same idea and says that that when people use social media, we not only consume the content but start comparing ourselves to that content which is specially curated with lots of effort and time to our effortless condition and people are not even conscious of the comparison that they are doing. This continuous competition with the others leads to anxiety and trauma and the never-ending self deprecation.

The virtual identity which people develop on social media is not always true "What we say is not always what we think'. This happens because social media still constitutes

a major section of society and the happenings on the internet affect our response towards society. It is not made up by society but it is society. That's why there is a censorship of thoughts and impressions which are accepted on social media and if people deviate from them they face harsh criticism and this criticism gets much harsher on women than men. Women are slut shamed, abused, and given death and rape threats if they do not conform with the traditional ideas of rules and regulations. Female users started social media in search of bond, support which was not allowed to them in the perimeters of their home and it soon became the tool for their activism, fight for freedom and freedom from archaic and barbaric ideas imposed upon them. They shared their mutual experiences and hardships that they faced due to the gender norms but the problem arose when men started seeing it as an attack on their own gender. " Studies suggested that men often monopolized discussions online, even when they were directly related to women and their gendered experiences "(Kramarae and Taylor 1993, Herring 1996).

**Subversion of Gender Roles in Cinema**

Women's gendered experiences are often viewed as an attack towards online masculinity which men on online platforms try to defend and display in a way where the authenticity of these experiences is questioned making it completely inadequate. But we cannot disregard the fact that this new social media has become the platform where we are discussing gender inequalities and gender based issues and it has the immense power to change, make and debunk the ongoing narrative sets for men and women. The film industry is the biggest propagator of an imagined idea of male and female, where men always function as saviours or the protector snatching the rights of both men and women. But in recent times movies like Pari, and Bulbul subverted the whole idea of who is going to protect and who is going to be protected. The man in both movies are there to help the heroines but let them fight their own battles. The journey and the quest to become empowered is on the women and men act as passive help which is important but not overpowering in the movies. These kinds of movies are the biggest help in changing society's perspective towards gender and its

treatment. Social media helps in making this genre of movies cause of the recent critics and analysts who are very vocalizing about the flaws and problematic ideas exemplified by the movies. So the new social media helps the traditional media in creating a more gender-fluid society.

The portrayal of toxic masculinity and ideal femininity has always been one of the key aspects of movies and media and now in the digital world, we have people who are still consuming and propagating these ideas. With the development of AI (Artificial Intelligence), social media has become much more adaptive and it propagates catered content tailored to individual tastes based on the traditional patterns of society. We can see the difference in the ads shown to men and women users. Female consumers are targeted with advertisements for makeup, clothes, and fashion are specially curated for women to propagate the traditional idea of how a women should be and similarly for men we see the beard ads, drink ads and other typically males associated things reflecting on their social media. It represents the traditional role of men and women and subconsciously creates boundaries of exploring gender identity as well as sexuality and enforces the idea to not cross boundaries. This becomes problematic for those people who are still trying to find and develop their identity and not seem able to put themselves in any category. They feel identity less, non existent, gender less in the world where people are hell bent on categorising one in a specific male or female gender.

**De- Categorizing the  Genders**

As we come from a legacy of traditional images of women and men and the database of Artificial intelligence is built upon the data already present on internet which creates a stereotypical binary of male and female. Now the creators of these social media also understand the influence of the representation of backward thinking on men and women which is now unwanted, undesirable and which clearly corners other gender. So they are also evolving the algorithms of media which would not categorise the gender specific things but provides a more gender friendly environment where the language, content are more fluid, flexible and in accordance with new gender culture. Hence, we see men hopping in the traditional feminine Roles and

female adapting so called masculine behaviours and these behaviours are made acceptable on social media to eradicate what we called social construction of gender. As Judith Butler, in her work The Psychic Life of Power spoke of female experience and the oppressive patterns evolving out of the female identity as conceived and operated by the patriarchy(Butler, 1997). "Accepting identities is the same as accepting dominant scripts and performing roles prescribed by them. Identities cannot be accurate representations of the real self when interpellation happens by hegemonic structures, people respond to it, especially oppressed ones perhaps because it recognizes them as a group" (Butler, 1997).

With the rise of LGBTQA+ rights and awareness regarding it is circulated by social media we see various versions of masculinity and feminity which people adapt in their personality. Gender theorist and scholars has provided the idea of gender which is constructed through social behaviours and adapted by constant practice of those behaviours. Gender and traditional demarcation of its characteristics are usually based on behaviour, language basically, all the concepts which can be fundamentally constructed. The idea of Judith butler of gender performance becomes the origin of discussion on the categorization of genders. In the modern world, the lines strictly drawn to keep everyone in their area it seems to be blurring with the discovery of many genders and sexuality(LGBTQ) and this has been propagated by social media as it facilitates the connection between individuals with similar experiences and also becomes the platform for all gender voices to be heard. Women and other LGBTQA+ people get the courage and support from the bond and the community they have made on social media to speak for themselves, their rights, thoughts and freedom. The LGBTQA+ are not just becoming aware of their existence and identity but social media also became a platform to educate others who are unaware of their existence.

**Conclusions**

In contemporary society, social media has become one of the greatest facilitators of activism for all the issues prevalent and it has become easy for everyone

to show their support and actively participate in the cause in which they believe. Gender has become diverse and instead of people treating gender issues objectively, they have a very subjective approach to understand and exercise it. Social media helped not only women and LGBTQA+ to subvert, reclaim or rewrite their constrained identities and gender norms but also made a space for men to break free from the chains of patriarchy and societal expectations to which they were tied to. At the same time we observe the vulnerable side of social media where people are still getting trapped into ideals and hiding behind the veil. Social Media was made to make the world more transparent which promotes gender equality, and reduce the disparity people faces because of various reasons. While reducing these past reasons it has created different reasons in the present which everyone if fighting now.

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Author's bio-note

Kirti Kumari is a postgraduate English literature student at the University of Delhi. She has completed her graduation from Amity University in B.A (home) English. She has already presented two papers in classical literature and digital Humanities. Her interest lies in Post-Colonial, disability ,dystopian literature and Folk studies. She will be moving forward with these topics in her PhD.