



A Qualitative Study on Social Media Communication and Information Sharing among Transgender Individuals

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has transformed communication practices among marginalized communities, including transgender individuals. This qualitative study examines how transgender individuals use social media for communication and information sharing in their personal, professional, and community lives. Using a case study approach, the research focuses on three purposively selected transgender participants who actively engage with platforms such as Instagram and YouTube. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns related to digital engagement. The findings indicate that social media functions as a significant communication tool that enables transgender individuals to build networks, access opportunities, and disseminate important information. Instagram was used by some participants to showcase professional skills, coordinate work, and expand employment prospects through reels, stories, and direct messaging. YouTube served as a learning platform and space for self-expression, supporting educational pursuits and creative sharing. Social media also facilitated the circulation of health-related information, including awareness of immunization, HIV prevention, gender-affirming procedures, and government welfare schemes. The study further reveals that social media supports identity affirmation and social inclusion. Participants used digital platforms to control self-representation, challenge stereotypes, and reduce social isolation by fostering interaction and solidarity. Despite challenges such as stigma and online discrimination, participants adopted strategic approaches to manage privacy and digital risks. Overall, the study concludes that social media acts as a transformative medium that enhances communication, empowerment, and socio-economic mobility among transgender individuals.

Keywords: Transgender Individuals, Social Media Communication, Information Sharing, Qualitative Case Study

Introduction

In recent years, global conversations around gender diversity and transgender rights have gained unprecedented visibility, partly due to the widespread use of online platforms. Major public debates on healthcare access, transphobic abuse online, and identity affirmation have unfolded across

social media spaces, drawing attention from scholars and activists alike. Social media has not only amplified these debates but has also become a central arena where transgender individuals articulate personal experiences, advocate for rights, and forge collective identities. With the proliferation of short-form video platforms and interactive networks,



transgender communities are leveraging digital communication channels to share narratives that were once marginalised or ignored by mainstream media. These digital spaces increasingly shape how the broader public perceives transgender lives, even as they reflect ongoing societal tensions and contested meanings of gender in public discourse.

Historically, transgender voices were excluded from dominant communication channels, forcing many to adapt by seeking alternative mediums for expression and community building. With limited representation in traditional media, early adopters turned to blogs, forums, and later social media to document personal transitions, share resources, and seek peers with similar experiences. Over time, these informal networks evolved into vibrant online communities where transgender individuals not only narrate their journeys but also negotiate their identities through public and private exchanges. This adaptive use of digital tools highlights a broader shift in how marginalised groups claim space in the public sphere, transcending geographic and socio-economic barriers to communication. Such processes of adaptation underscore the active role that transgender users have played in shaping the communicative functions of social media beyond passive consumption.

Social media operates as a multifaceted communication environment where transgender individuals exchange information, seek support, and build digital solidarities. Through platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and niche forums, people share health information, transition tips, emotional support, and advocacy messages that are often unavailable offline. Social networking sites enable multidirectional communication—where users both produce and consume content—allowing community members to express concerns, celebrate milestones, and provide lived-experience insights that contribute to collective knowledge. Research has shown that health and wellness themes, including nutrition, hormone therapy, and emotional wellbeing, are widely disseminated through vlogs and peer-to-peer exchanges on platforms like YouTube, reflecting key informational needs of transgender communities

online. SNSs have thus become critical sites for both informational and emotional support for transgender users.

Beyond information sharing, social media plays a significant role in the formation and maintenance of community networks that foster belonging and resilience. Facebook groups and private forums, for example, serve as safer spaces where transgender and gender-diverse adults can access peer advice and localized information, strengthening social bonds and mitigating feelings of isolation often experienced in offline contexts. LGBTQ youth and transgender adolescents also use social platforms to source social support, validation, and coping strategies, particularly when traditional support systems are absent or inadequate. Users often curate multiple social media identities and networks to manage self-presentation, navigate safety concerns, and tailor their communication to specific audiences—revealing strategic practices of identity management in digital environments. These interactions illustrate how social media facilitates both community cohesion and individual negotiation of identity.

While social media offers opportunities for connection and knowledge exchange, it is not without challenges, including exposure to transphobia, misinformation, and platform governance issues that can marginalise transgender voices. Previous studies emphasize the need for critical engagement with these digital platforms, as online spaces can both empower and expose transgender individuals to hostility. Nevertheless, the prevalence of social media use among transgender populations underscores its centrality to contemporary communication practices, making it a valuable site for qualitative inquiry into how information is shared, meanings are constructed, and communities are sustained. Exploring these dynamics not only contributes to academic understandings of digital communication but also highlights the lived realities and communicative agency of transgender individuals in the digital age.



Literature Review

Social media platforms have transformed contemporary communication by enabling interactive, user-generated, and networked forms of information sharing. Scholars argue that platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok function as participatory communication spaces where users actively produce and circulate content rather than passively consume it (Boyd, 2014; Jenkins, 2006). These digital environments allow marginalized communities to bypass traditional media gatekeeping and construct their own narratives. Research indicates that social networking sites facilitate peer-to-peer information exchange, emotional support, and identity negotiation, particularly among minority groups (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). Papacharissi (2010) describes online spaces as “networked publics” where identity and discourse are shaped through technological affordances. In the context of LGBTQ+ communities, social media platforms provide access to health information, community events, and advocacy campaigns that are often inaccessible offline (Craig et al., 2015). Thus, digital platforms serve not only as communication tools but also as critical infrastructures for information dissemination and collective mobilization.

Within transgender communities specifically, social media has emerged as a significant site for identity affirmation, health information sharing, and community building. Studies show that transgender individuals use platforms such as YouTube and Instagram to document transition journeys, share hormone therapy experiences, and provide guidance to others navigating similar paths (Raun, 2016). YouTube vlogs, in particular, function as digital storytelling spaces where lived experiences are archived and circulated globally. Fox and Ralston (2016) found that social media engagement among LGBTQ youth enhances social connectedness and reduces feelings of isolation. Additionally, Facebook groups and Reddit forums often act as semi-private spaces where transgender users exchange localized medical information, legal advice, and emotional support. DeHaan et al. (2013) note that online

communities contribute significantly to psychosocial wellbeing by offering validation and safe interaction environments. These findings highlight how social media platforms operate as both informational and relational networks for transgender users.

However, transgender individuals must also strategically manage risks associated with online visibility, including harassment, transphobia, and privacy concerns. Research suggests that many users adopt selective self-presentation strategies, such as maintaining multiple accounts, adjusting privacy settings, or carefully curating audiences to balance authenticity with safety (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Cho (2018) emphasizes that while digital spaces provide empowerment, they also expose transgender individuals to online discrimination and platform-based moderation challenges. Consequently, transgender users often develop digital literacy skills to navigate algorithmic biases and protect themselves from harmful interactions. Some rely on closed groups and encrypted messaging platforms to maintain safer communication channels. Despite these challenges, the literature consistently demonstrates that social media remains central to transgender communication practices, enabling agency, resistance, and community solidarity. Understanding how transgender individuals negotiate these affordances and constraints is essential for examining digital communication and information sharing in contemporary society.

Objective of the Study

- To explore how transgender individuals use social media for communication and information sharing

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore social media communication and information sharing practices among transgender individuals. A case study approach is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of lived experiences within specific social and digital contexts. The case study method enables the researcher to examine participants’ narratives, meanings, and interpretations in detail,



rather than focusing on generalization. Since the study aims to understand subjective experiences, identity negotiation, and communication practices, qualitative inquiry is considered appropriate. This approach allows rich description, contextual interpretation, and exploration of nuanced social realities within transgender. The study consists of three cases, selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is appropriate because participants are chosen based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria required participants to identify as transgender and actively use social media platforms for communication and information sharing. This technique ensures that the selected cases possess direct experience and knowledge related to the phenomenon under study.

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Each participant was interviewed individually to ensure privacy and encourage open sharing of experiences. An interview guide was prepared covering themes such as social media usage patterns, types of information shared, communication networks, identity presentation, experiences of support or discrimination, and coping strategies. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. Field notes were also maintained to capture non-verbal cues, emotional expressions, and contextual observations that enriched the data. Open-ended questions allowed participants to freely narrate their experiences without restriction. Probing questions were used to clarify responses and gain deeper insight into specific themes.

Case 1

The first participant is a 32-year-old transgender woman currently working as a cook. She mainly assists in preparing food for marriages and other special occasions. During her teenage years, she did not receive support from her family due to her gender identity. As a result, she ran away to Mumbai, where she underwent gender-affirming surgery. After the surgery, she worked in small shops to support herself and gradually gained work experience.

Later, she returned to Tamil Nadu and began taking up small jobs to sustain her livelihood. She eventually secured work in a biryani shop, where she learned cooking techniques and catering skills. Over time, she became skilled in handling large-scale cooking for weddings and events. Apart from cooking, she also performs physically demanding tasks such as lifting heavy vessels and washing utensils during large functions. Her dedication and hard work helped her become a regular team member in marriage and occasion-based catering services.

She learned to use Instagram through her friends, which significantly changed her professional life. Through Instagram, she started sharing her work experiences, photos, and videos from wedding events and catering functions. She regularly posts reels and stories showcasing her cooking skills and teamwork. Whenever additional workers are needed for a function, she shares updates through Instagram stories. Instagram has helped her communicate quickly with event organizers and co-workers without depending only on phone calls. It has also enabled her to respond to inquiries, coordinate work schedules, and build professional relationships more efficiently. As a result, she receives frequent calls for work opportunities through contacts made on Instagram. According to her, Instagram has played a major role in expanding her network, strengthening communication, and improving her employment opportunities.

Case 2

The second participant is a 39-year-old transgender woman working as a sanitary worker. She obtained this job opportunity through a contact referred by her friends. She begins her day early at 4 a.m. and reports to work on time. Her primary responsibility is visiting houses to collect waste in her assigned area. Through her regular interactions with residents, she has built strong and positive relationships within the community. She describes herself as friendly and helpful, and the residents treat her with respect and dignity. She takes pride in her work and feels valued both at her workplace and in society.



Beyond her employment, she actively participates in several NGOs that focus on the upliftment of the transgender community. She believes in contributing to society and improving social acceptance for people like her. Although she wished to pursue formal education earlier in life, financial responsibilities required her to start working. However, her desire to learn did not diminish. She enrolled in a Tamil literature program and continues her studies alongside her job. She sees education as a way to empower herself and others in her community.

YouTube plays a significant role in her communication and learning process. She uses YouTube to attend online classes, watch lectures related to Tamil literature, and access educational resources that support her academic growth. The platform enables her to learn at her own pace despite her demanding work schedule. She also runs her own YouTube channel, where she shares videos about her daily life, livelihood experiences, and reflections as a transgender woman. In addition, she uploads videos of herself reciting Bharathiyar kavithaigal and other literary works, which has earned her a modest but supportive group of followers. Through YouTube, she not only gains knowledge but also shares information, spreads awareness about transgender issues, and inspires others through her educational journey. The platform allows her to communicate her identity, talents, and experiences to a wider audience beyond her immediate locality.

Case 3

The third participant is a 42-year-old transgender woman working as a community health worker. Similar to the previous cases, her life journey has been shaped by struggle, resilience, and self-determination. She grew up without consistent family support and eventually had to survive independently after being distanced from her family due to her gender identity. With no stable home environment, she migrated to another town and began taking up small jobs to support herself. Over time, she became involved in community-based activities and gradually developed an interest in

social service. Her lived experiences of exclusion motivated her to work for the wellbeing of others in the transgender community.

She currently holds a responsible position within local community health initiatives and is actively involved in outreach programs. Her work focuses primarily on transgender health awareness, including immunization drives, HIV prevention, hormone therapy guidance, and post-surgical care awareness. She also educates community members about government welfare schemes, identity documentation processes, and health insurance benefits available for transgender individuals. Through field visits and small group meetings, she spreads awareness about protection measures, and the importance of regular medical check-ups. She often accompanies community members to hospitals to ensure they receive respectful and proper treatment. Her role has earned her recognition and trust within the community.

Instagram plays a crucial role in her communication and information-sharing efforts. She uses the platform to post informative reels and stories about vaccination camps, health check-up schedules, and newly introduced government schemes. Through Instagram, she shares verified information about surgeries, precautions, and mental health support resources. She also uses direct messaging to respond to confidential health-related queries from transgender individuals who may hesitate to seek help publicly. The platform allows her to circulate event posters, awareness videos, and helpline numbers quickly and effectively. By using Instagram as a digital outreach tool, she is able to connect with younger members of the community and expand her awareness campaigns beyond physical boundaries. According to her, social media has strengthened her ability to educate, mobilize, and support transgender individuals in matters related to health and wellbeing.

Discussion

The findings from Case 1, Case 2, and Case 3 demonstrate that social media functions as an important communication bridge in the lives of



transgender individuals. For Case 1, Instagram became a professional networking tool that enabled her to connect with event organizers, catering teams, and clients. Instead of relying only on word-of-mouth communication, she used reels and stories to showcase her skills and availability. This expanded her reach beyond her immediate circle and improved employment opportunities. In Case 2, YouTube served as both a learning platform and a space for self-expression. It allowed her to communicate her identity, talents, and educational aspirations to a broader audience. In Case 3, Instagram operated as a digital outreach platform where health awareness information could be disseminated quickly and effectively. Across all three cases, social media strengthened direct, timely, and accessible communication.

Social media also facilitated meaningful information sharing tailored to their personal and professional needs. Case 1 shared updates about catering work, team requirements, and event schedules, which helped streamline coordination and build reliable work networks. Case 2 used YouTube to access online classes, literary content, and educational materials, demonstrating how digital platforms can compensate for limited access to formal education. She further contributed by sharing poems and reflections, turning information consumption into knowledge production. Case 3 used Instagram strategically to circulate information about immunization drives, HIV prevention, government welfare schemes, and healthcare services for transgender individuals. Her posts functioned as public health communication tools within the community. These cases show that social media platforms act as both receivers and transmitters of valuable information.

Beyond communication and information exchange, social media contributed significantly to empowerment and social recognition. For Case 1, Instagram enhanced her professional identity and financial stability by generating consistent work opportunities. For Case 2, YouTube strengthened her self-confidence, intellectual growth, and public visibility while fostering respect from viewers and

community members. For Case 3, Instagram amplified her leadership role in community health awareness and expanded her ability to serve marginalized individuals. In all three cases, social media reduced isolation by creating networks of support and interaction. It enabled them to present their identities positively and challenge social stigma through visibility and engagement. Overall, social media platforms functioned as tools of empowerment, economic support, education, and community development in their lives.

Another important observation is that social media provided these individuals with autonomy over their narratives. Instead of being represented by mainstream media or external voices, they controlled how their stories were shared and perceived. Case 1 used visual content to highlight her hard work and professionalism, reshaping public perceptions about transgender employment. Case 2 used YouTube to express her intellectual interests and literary talents, challenging stereotypes associated with transgender individuals. Case 3 used Instagram to communicate credible health information and establish herself as a responsible community leader. This control over self-representation strengthened their confidence and allowed them to participate actively in digital public spaces.

Finally, social media acted as a tool for social inclusion and community transformation. It created opportunities for collaboration, learning, and advocacy that extended beyond geographical limitations. For Case 1, digital visibility translated into livelihood security. For Case 2, it enabled continuous education and cultural expression despite economic constraints. For Case 3, it enhanced the reach and effectiveness of community health campaigns. Collectively, these cases indicate that social media is not merely a communication platform but a strategic resource for survival, growth, and collective upliftment within transgender communities. The integration of digital tools into their daily lives reflects broader patterns of digital empowerment among marginalized groups in contemporary society.



Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role of social media in shaping communication and information-sharing practices among transgender individuals. Through the experiences of the three cases, it is evident that platforms such as Instagram and YouTube function as more than social networking sites; they serve as tools for livelihood, education, health awareness, and community engagement. Social media enabled the participants to expand professional networks, access learning opportunities, and disseminate important information within and beyond their communities. These platforms provided them with opportunities to express their identities confidently and to challenge prevailing social stigma.

The findings also demonstrate that social media fosters empowerment by offering visibility, autonomy, and connection. Each participant used digital platforms strategically according to their personal and professional needs—whether for employment generation, academic learning, or community health advocacy. By controlling their narratives and sharing lived experiences, they reshaped public perceptions and strengthened their social presence. At the same time, social media reduced isolation by creating supportive networks and enabling real-time communication.

Overall, the study concludes that social media plays a transformative role in the lives of transgender individuals by enhancing communication, facilitating information exchange, and promoting social inclusion. It serves as a medium of resilience and self-representation in contexts where traditional systems may fail to provide adequate support. Understanding these digital practices is essential for recognizing the communicative agency of transgender communities and for developing inclusive digital and social policies in the future.

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