

CONSTRUCTION OF DIGITAL GENDER IDENTITY IN SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILES

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ABSTRACT

Social media application is not just a tool for sending messages; instead, it's a place where people of different genders, different thoughts, and different perspectives make their place in the digital world. This study analyzes self-identity and gender performance in different social media applications like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp. For this purpose, 60 social media profiles have been collected and analyzed through mixed method research. Textual Analysis of data lead to linguistic Analysis and Visual Analysis of social media profiles. The data shows significant variation in linguistic and visual features of profiles of male, female and non-binary users in digital world. The study reflects that female social media users employ indirect and casual way of linguistic communication relying on visual and typographical indicators to create friendly atmosphere; while, males use direct, formal and professional expressions to reflect their social gender role in their profiles. Non-binary gender participants display distinctive visual features i.e animated avatars rather than profile pictures to conceal their gender identity. This study manifests that online gender identity is carryover of offline gender identity. These findings can assist different companies of online marketing and technology layout to focus accurately on the gender identity on social media for achieving efficient/ comprehensive digital competence, desirable for growth.

Keywords: social media, gender performance, typographical and visual, digital identity

INTRODUCTION

In current digital era, social media has emerged as a major platform for conversation. Social media becomes a public display where people of different genders show their identity. Youth spend their leisure time in engaging with different social media applications like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, or TikTok. In these applications, users introduce themselves by creating profiles for digital impression. During profile creation, bio section, status update, captions, or online chatting together create social identity according to gender. Gender is the most vital part of identity that is revealed by linguistic and visual choices like

particular lexical items and emojis. Social media influences and is influenced by the perspectives of gender held in society as gender is not something that is inherited; rather it is created by the social practices (Butler, 1990). At digital platforms, gender is formed by non-verbal signs. Users create their identity through their digital performance generating possibility for blurring the traditional gender boundaries (Tajfel, 1979).

The most significant point to be considered in this debate is types of different social media platforms. Twitter is utilized for professional and formal style; while Instagram have casual posts having informal style. This variance is vital to understand the

association between gender and language. Apart from that, non-binary gender identities challenge the concept of traditional gender indicating that digital gender identity is capable of constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing off-line gender identity in real world.

Many researchers explored and explained how gender-oriented choices shape our identity on social media. Social media life is like a theatre where people perform like an actor. Every user can alter their identity according to situation on 'front stage' and 'back stage' according to their gender (Goffman, 1956). However, limited research is available on construction of gender identities in profiles at social media platforms. This research gap in understanding how male and female social media users, in general, and non-binary gender, in particular, use different communication styles and visuals to show their identity in social media. This research is intended to illustrate how digital discourse constructs our identity on internet turning this world into digital universe.

Research Questions

Q. No.1: What linguistic features are employed by social media users of three different genders?

Q. No. 2: What type of visuals are preferred by social media users of different genders?

Q. No. 3: How do particular linguistic and visual preferences construct gender identity at social media platforms?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A significant amount of research has been carried out on digital identity over the time. Prior research provides insights into its reason, impacts or consequences. By the help of two significant conceptual frameworks in linguistics, the online spaces of gender and identity have been understood. The seminal work 'Impression Management' by Erving Goffman (1959) is the foundation of this study. According to Goffman, when a person meets or greets someone, they leave their specific impression, which is called "front stage" meaning social persona.

Robin Lakoff (1975) discoursed gender identity in her book "Language and Women's Place". According to her, women use diplomatic speech,

tagged statement (e.g. isn't it?) and expression of uncertainty in their language. On the other side, men adopt direct communication style. Similarly, digital writers also exhibit this distinction on the internet as well. Mostly females use soft tone and softening punctuation (like ~ or) while men use powerful tone and direct words.

Another foundational notion for this study is 'Gender performativity' by Judith Butler (1990). According to Butler, gender is a social performance which is recurring every day and every time because sex-based identity is not an inherent or genetic thing. This performance on the social media applications like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram etc. is in the form of stylistic text, emoji, or profile picture where the users show their gender identity.

Deborah Tanen's (1990) 'Genderlect Theory' in her famous publication 'You just don't understand: women and men in conversation' is based on the precept of two-culture theory. According to her, males and females belong to different cultures in the society. Consequently, males use "Report talk" to share their power, social status, or information; while women use "Rapport talk" to build connections and relationships. Likewise, females use soft words, or indirect expressions to show closeness contrary to men whose language is explicit, fact-based or logical. Although Tannen's 'difference theory' serves a strong foundation for analyzing genders communication pattern; however, sociolinguist like Cameron (2005) criticize on Tannen's theory for proposing that report or rapport communication style of gender is affected by the context.

Investigation of social media profiles of males and females has been focus of Herring and Paolillo (2006) in an empirical study. They came up with the findings that there is statistical difference between male and female's communication style. Females use connection-based and dynamic language in their communication; while male use logical or thoughtful language like nouns, adjectives, facts etc. Argamon et al. (2007) conducted a quantitative stylistic analysis of modifiers of more than 7100 social media profiles and approved that males use more modifiers (the,

that) or quantity expressions in their communication but females use personal pronouns (like I, we, they) or social relation styles words.

Zizi Papacharisi (2010) applied the impression management theory on different social media applications and found that users construct their digital personas through their account profile, text style, or bio section in its front-stage performance. As a result, digital world becomes the social place to show their identity. Bamman, et al. (2014) carried out computational analysis of the social media application Twitter. The analysis of tweets showed that gender is not a binary factor like just male and female.

The review of the related literature aptly illuminates linguistic behaviors of both the genders as well as discussing intersection between digital discourse and gender. However, there is dearth of research to ponder how digital profiles reflect/construct gender identity on internet. There is research gap in understanding how people of different genders (including non-binary gender) use different communicative styles, emoji or expressions to show their identity turning this world into digital living place.

METHODOLOGY

Both quantitative and qualitative research design are combined as a mixed-method research design being the most suitable method to supply better understanding of research problem (Sharma et al., 2023). Textual Analysis of data leads to classification of categories: linguistic Analysis and Visual Analysis. At first step, the data is quantified in form of frequencies and percentage in both the categories; at second step, in-depth insights are grasped by qualitative interpretations of these categories to assess the social behavior and gender identity performance embedded in digital discourse at social media platforms. The data for the analysis of profiles of social media applications are taken from profiles created between August 2025 and April 2026 on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

Data Collection

Data is collected from 60 profiles: 20 profiles are taken from each social media platform. To represent the participant categories equally, we use API-based data retrieval and random sampling technique. For this research, purposive sampling technique is applied to analyze the active profiles of social media user especially young generation and university-going participants. These applications are selected because these have “bio or about section” where users can show their identity depending on gender. To make the data fair, unbiased and balanced, the data is systematized into three categories:

- Male-oriented profile: 20 participants
- Female-oriented profile: 20 participants
- Non-binary users (with no specific gender category: 20 participants

DATA ANALYSIS

In this research, CDMA (Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis) is applied to analyze profiles of different social media applications. All participants either male, female or gender-diverse use different linguistic style, lexical expressions and visuals. The following analytical parameters are set to categorize the data in profiles at social media platforms.

(1) Textual Parameters

(a) **Lexical features:** Use of different lexical items according to their gender such as pronouns and occupational titles like founder, boss, CEO, etc. to show their power, social status, or authority on digital platforms is pivotal point. Relational or emotional terms like family, love, cartoon lover, papa’s princess, self-obsessed, etc. are also focused for reflecting gender behaviors. This study embraces abstract keywords related to values, achievement and status on social media profiles for analysis.

(b) **Typographical conventions:** deviant capitalization patterns, empathetic punctuation like “!!!!”, deviant sentence construction like fragments, and incomplete sentences are included in typographical conventions.

(2) Cross-Model Parameters

Visuals: profile pictures, landscapes, different signs or symbols i.e emojis (like ☺ ☹ ;) to make profiles unique, trendy and aesthetically appealing fall in the category of Cross-model visual indicators for sake of data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The real names or personal data of the users of digital platforms is concealed to maintain privacy of all the participants. No personal information or matter is shared following research ethics.

FINDINGS

Linguistic Features

Textual Analysis of the social media profiles searched out patterns of variation in linguistic style, textual formatting providing quantitative data for deriving frequencies and percentages. a huge difference has been seen in distribution of specific linguistics and textual characteristics showing significant variation in profiles of different gender identities like male profiles, female profiles, and non-binary profiles.

Linguistic Features	Male profiles: 20	Female profiles=20	Non-binary prof=20
Personal Pronouns	4 (15%)	15 (36%)	18 (45%)
Irregular Synt. patterns	3 (11%)	13 (31%)	12 (30%)
Capitalization variation	4 (15%)	11 (26%)	4 (10%)
Use of professional titles	16 (59%)	3 (7%)	6 (15%)

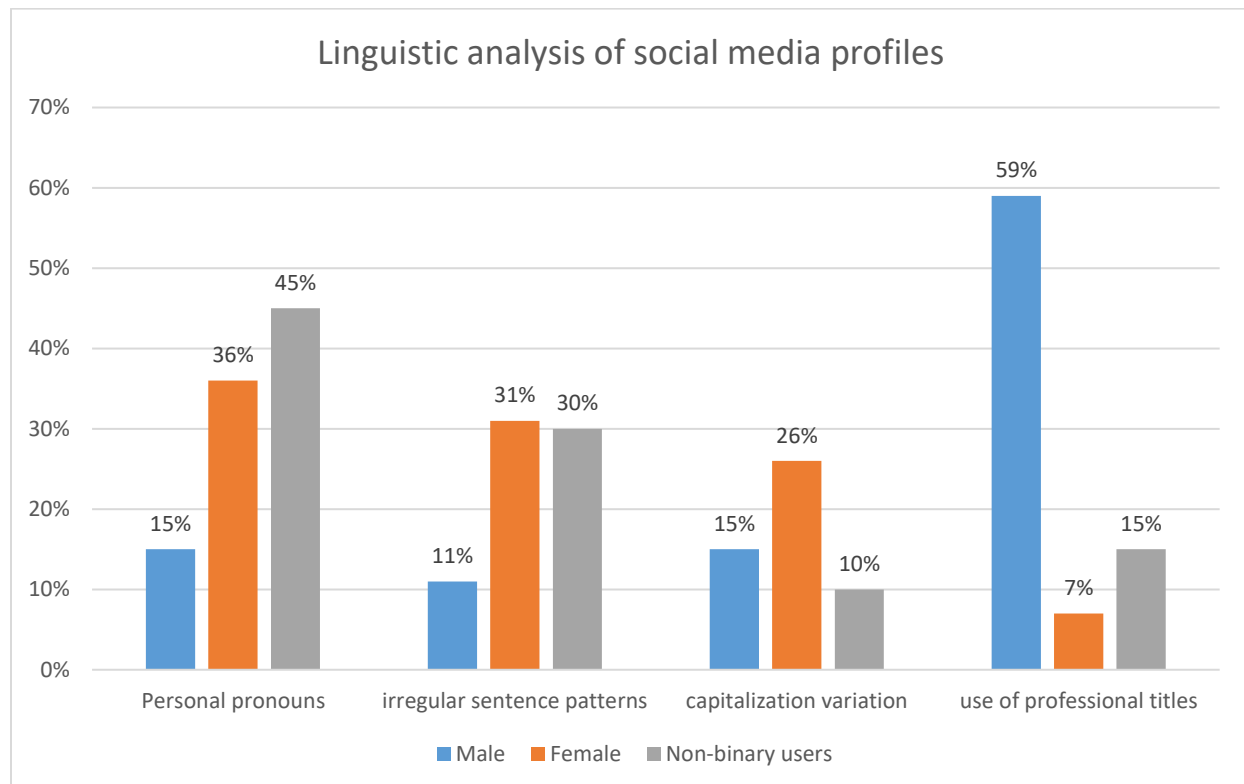


Figure 1: Linguistic Analysis of social media profiles of males, females, and non-binary gender

Textual analysis of the data displayed in Table 1 and Figure 1 reflects that female profiles mostly rely on stylistic mechanism and manipulation of syntactic order to express their identity and

attitudinal inclinations in the category of capitalization and irregular sentence structure. In the category of personal pronouns, females also prefer personal pronouns more than that of male

profiles. Male profiles strike due to exceeding use of professional titles with 59% lead at social media platforms. However, profiles of non-binary gender display use of personal pronouns with 45% along with irregular sentence structures parallel to female profiles.

Visual Features

display picture and color preference present aesthetic and attitudinal inclinations of users on different social media accounts. This analysis of visual patterns guides to get insight into formation of gender identities at social media platforms where neither the voice is heard nor the face is seen.

Visual Features	Male profiles	Female profiles	Non-binary profiles
Profile picture	15 (71%)	14 (47%)	0 (0%)
Emoji	6 (29%)	16 (53%)	10 (28%)
Designs	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (23%)
Animated avatars	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	17 (49%)

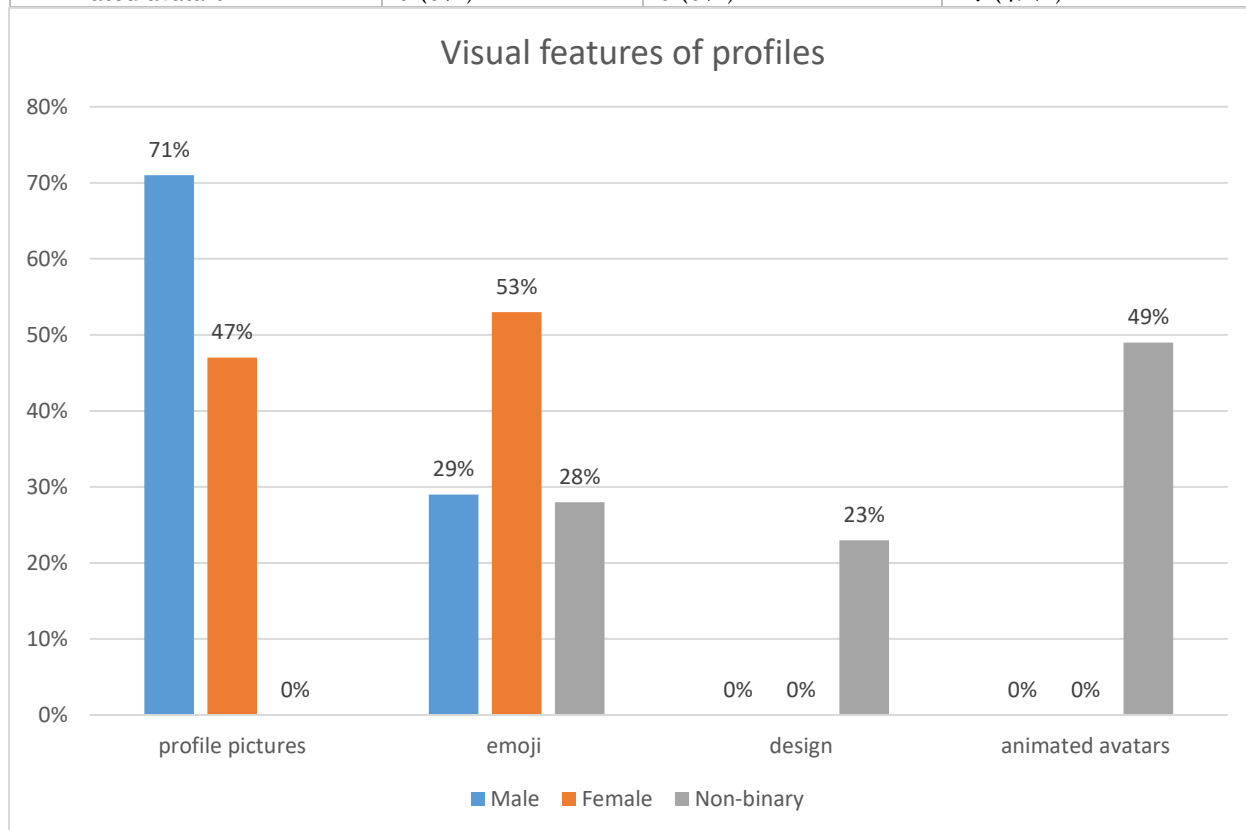


Figure 2: Display of visual features of profiles

the data analysis of visual display indicates that males mostly (71%) use face-centered profile pictures or performance-oriented images on social media profiles; while females frequently employ emojis (53%) to express their emotions and identities. No doubt, male users also display emoji but not so frequently as the female users do on their social media profiles. In non-binary gender

profiles, 49% users uploaded animated-style avatar to hide their identity on social media.

DISCUSSION

In this research, empirical data show that online digital platforms give a chance to different genders to show identity on social media. It is discovered that different gender categories choose particular

lexical expressions to convey their emotions to digital community. Female participants prefer to use pronouns on their profiles rather than professional titles which are mostly visible in male profiles. Females usually use lexical items like “cute girl”, “foodie”, “cartoon lover”, “papa’s princess”, etc; while males prefer “traveler”, “attitude boy”, “doctor”, “engineer”, “alone”, “single” etc. to show their professional and social status. Another feature that has been greatly noticed is irregular use of capitalization and syntactic structure in female social media users in bio section to create welcoming and friendly visual vibes to build relationships on social media.

In case of emojis, this research study manifests that females more frequently use emojis than males who favor to display their pictures at social media. The type of emoji also matters employed by male and female users. female profiles have emojis like “heart”, “flower”, “smiling face”, “innocent face”, etc. while emojis used by male users are “king”, “crown”, “fire”, “attitude face” etc. to show their social status, power or career in bio section of profiles. The most significant difference lies in the selection of the visuals for the profiles of non-binary gender. These users apply animated avatars rather than pictures to conceal their gender category. They also employ emojis for the maintaining secrecy of their identity.

The in-depth qualitative analysis reflects that males use themes of dark color, professional blue palette or black-and-white to show professional identity on social media. However, females select soft backgrounds as a mirror, garden, light colored theme to show their femininity related aesthetics. Users of non-binary gender have distinct preference for bright colored themes.

CONCLUSION

Social media is evolving to embrace the modern era. Ever changing social media applications have revolutionized the life of the modern man. But it is questionable whether revolution in social media has transfigured the gender identities at digital platforms or these are analogous to gender identities in the real world. This query drove the current study to investigate the empirical evidences at various social platforms. This research

comes up with the findings that male, female and non-binary gender preferences at digital platforms Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok and WhatsApp are distinct to mark their individual gender identity. Female participants use expressive style of communication by using emoji, emotional lexical items, symbolic colors, and non-standard capitalization to create friendly discourse environment. However, males use direct and professional style of communication to mark their social identity. In the same way, participants of non-binary gender use abstract or animated avatars instead of their personal picture not disclosing their particular identity. From which it was discovered that there is a strong relation between digital identity and ‘gender performance’ proposed by Butler (1990). After analyzing their linguistic preferences, typographical markers, and visual applications, it is claimed that social media is not just a visual stylistic persona but also a tool to construct and reconstruct the perspectives of people. This is the ‘front stage’ built by careful contemplations for depicting their identity according to their gender roles in society. This study adds value to existing literature about non-binary gender who has created diverse environment at social media. This gender uses unique techniques to mark their identity online. This study proves that social media is a platform that has inscriptions for constructing identities which are parallel to real world. In other words, it can be claimed that online gender identities are carryover of offline gender identities.

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