

Empowerment Through Connection: Social media as a tool for Community Building among Transgender

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Abstract: *Social media has revolutionized the way people connect, communicate, and share their experiences, becoming a powerful tool for self-expression and community building. For transgender individuals, these platforms offer unique opportunities to explore and affirm their identities in safe, supportive spaces. Qualitative case study was used in the study to understand the community building and how they use digital space for inclusiveness in the main stream. This study examines the ways transgender individuals utilize social media platforms to build supportive communities and explore their identities. Also, it helps in communication, sharing information, seeking information, empowerment, advocacy for their rights, raising awareness, decision making and also highlights the challenges like harassment and discrimination faced by transgender individuals.*

Keywords: *Social media, Communication, Community Building, Sahodaran.*

1. INTRODUCTION :

Every individual including transgender individual use social media for various purpose. Transgender individual use social media mainly to connect with others, to seek and share information, post their transition related clip and video documents through social media profile and engage in identity work and expression (Oliver, et al., 2020 and Justin, et al.,2021). Social media is the place where the transgender individual can document their identity, their transition which make some sense about their struggles, helps to build community in wider range and also find support for their welfare (Ellen, et al., 2020). Charlie, et al., said that these social media platforms provide emotional support like evaluation support for validating experience and informational support like provide health related information and helps to make educational decision (Charlie, et al.,2018).

Transgender access social media platform to connect and communicate with others. Mainly they communicate to share their experience, build emotional support and informational support (Ellen, et al., 2020). Social media also offer transgender people special tool and application to create their own sense of knowledge, for better communication to interact with others and also to establish new relationship, friendship and experience. Transgender individuals express and explore their gender identity through different social media platform, it helps them to engage their gender work over time and across different platform (Justin, et al.,2021). Trans time is one of the Trans specific social media sites, that provide safe and secure space for transgender individual to express themselves like their transition and also help them to find support (Oliver, et al.,2020).

By connect others in different platform on social media, transgender individuals share information like their thoughts, experience and help to raise awareness. Transgender individual often utilizes social media to their life story and struggle by posting their transition related content and post. Thus, with the usage of social media platform they document their life and make awareness about their transition journey among every individual. Social media also used to present and disclose their life change like gender transition, they use the platform like Tumblr to document their transition in easy way and also their platform help and receive support from their online community.



2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Transgender individual use social media to seek information

To seek information related to health and identity, transgender individual use social media platform, to gain additional information in easy way. To access transgender relation support form online communities, transgender utilize social media platform (Thomas, et al., 2021). Haimson (2020) stated that transgender individuals face barriers to seek information like health and identity, including platform censorship, misinformation and lack of tools to access platform can enhance transgender individual health information seeking by providing accurate, accessible and relevant medical information, thus it also offers safety and security by providing privacy feature and tools to avoid inaccurate content (Laima, et al., 2021).

2.2 Transgender Individual use social media to advocate for rights

With usage of social media transgender individual can find various way to advocate for their rights. Social media are utilized for identity work, to connect with others, find resources and share their transition related content (Floriber, et al., 2022). Countries with strict homophobic laws and countries which also enable activist to use strategies like interactive and personalized one to engage the audience, can offers a safe avenue for advocacy Beth (2017). He added that LGBTQ advocacy organization use social media platform to circulate the exceed messages and connect with other LGBTQ youth and influence in sexual identity formation (Erica and Ciszek 2017). Additionally, LGBT social media user had enabled the creation of sharing identities and communities, which hold the political significance (Beth ,2018).

2.3 Transgender Individual use social media to raise awareness

To raise awareness about the issues faced transgender people, social media offers various way. To raise awareness through social media is not easy, because different people have different opinion. However, sharing transgender related information or content can be challenging due to the lack of specific trans inclusive features and trans identity may not accept by the presence of individual (Mercedes, et al., 2017). Despite of challenges, social media provide a platform for transgender individual to express themselves and also raise awareness about the issues they faced (Thomas, 2021).

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To access the impact and the use of social media by transgender
- To identify how the social media supports transgender in community building

4. METHODOLOGY

The study employed in-depth interview, it is a valuable method for gathering qualitative data. This offers several benefits like they allow for a dynamic conversation between transgender individuals, allowing them to share their uncover discrimination stories and experience. Total of two cases were explored in the study, which encourages detailed narration of the transgender individual and also it provides multiple information and allow researcher to understand the context and their experience. The study was carried out in Sahodaran, a community based non profitable organization to the transgender and LGBTIQ+ community in Chennai. It provides HIV/AIDS prevention, care services, social support, counselling and crisis intervention. To promotes social recognition for sexual minorities, Sahodaran empower community members to become leaders. With the usage of fund, the organization planned to offer essential service such as counselling, drop-in centre, advocacy, internships, skill building and livelihood training categories include beauty and grooming, ticketing, tourism, hospitality, art and craft, trade, accounting, medical lab technology, fashion, textiles, agriculture, graphic designing, business management and soft skill development. The study employees purposive sampling techniques, data was collected in selected fields as per the rules and regulation derived by Sahodaran organisation.

CASE 1

Sara, 35-year-old was born in Hyderabad, and from a young age, she identified as transgender. Her parents were supportive, allowing her to embrace her true self, and even celebrated her unique actions. Unlike many transgender individuals, Sara did not face significant struggles within her family and, with their support, transitioned from male to female. However, when Sara entered the transgender community in 2010, she encountered challenges, including gossip and a lack of mutual support among community members. She expressed disappointment at this lack of solidarity, remarking that if the community itself doesn't offer support, expecting understanding from society becomes even harder. Although she didn't face substantial public discrimination, housing discrimination emerged as a persistent issue. Landlords often refused to rent her a home simply because she is transgender. Even when offered a place, transgender individuals like Sara often face risks of harassment or sexual abuse from landlords, a struggle common in the community. Sara uses social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook for both relaxation and professional growth. As a baking artist, she relies on these platforms to stay updated on trends and techniques, understanding that staying



current is crucial for her career. Social media not only aids her professionally but also serves as a medium to share and acquire knowledge.

Despite her expertise, she hesitates to teach her skills to others in the transgender community due to the ego and self-doubt she perceives within the group. She mentions that some community members feel inferior in a learning position, which hinders collective growth. Sara remains cautious on social media, especially regarding revealing her identity publicly. Her family is unaware of her being transgender, and she fears that being visible in community-related social media posts could affect them. Moreover, she has faced harassment and sexual comments online, such as inappropriate requests regarding her clothing. Initially hurt by this hate speech, Sara has grown stronger, choosing to focus on the positive and use these experiences as motivation to grow further. She plans to launch a YouTube channel to expand her reach but is currently delayed due to housing issues. Sara sees social media as a powerful tool for sharing critical information, such as sex education and awareness about transgender issues, which she believes can drive meaningful change in society.

CASE 2

Abinaya, a 36-year-old transgender woman from Poneri, Tamil Nadu, faced significant challenges growing up. She had to drop out of school after the 8th standard due to her family's financial struggles. Despite the hardships, she remained determined to build a better future. Working in jobs such as petrol bunks and hotels, she endured harassment and discrimination. Eventually, she shifted to daily collection work to sustain herself, but these experiences strengthened her resolve to fight for dignity and equality. As an active member of the transgender community, Abinaya now runs a trust that supports around 500 transgender individuals. Her trust focuses on helping transgender people lead dignified lives, steering them away from prostitution by providing financial aid and resources. Abinaya is passionate about education, believing it to be the cornerstone of change. Her dream is to empower more transgender individuals through education, enabling them to achieve self-reliance and respect in society.

Abinaya actively uses social media platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram to further her cause. On WhatsApp, she participates in community groups that share information about welfare measures, rights, and guidance for transgender individuals. These groups, managed by experienced community members, help new members navigate challenges and access support. On Instagram, Abinaya shares her daily experiences, struggles, and achievements, using the platform to educate others about the discrimination transgender people face and how society can support them. She views social media as a powerful tool to bridge the gap between the transgender community and the wider society. Through her efforts, she has received recognition and support, fostering greater understanding of transgender issues. Despite her successes, Abinaya continues to face discrimination and harassment, including verbal abuse and physical violence in public spaces. However, her unwavering spirit drives her to keep fighting for equality and awareness. She believes that through education, advocacy, and platforms like social media, society can move toward greater acceptance and inclusion of transgender individuals.

5. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Transgender uses WhatsApp to connect with fellow transgender individuals, sharing crucial information, welfare measures, and guidance. These groups, moderated by experienced members, foster a sense of belonging and provide essential support for navigating societal challenges. These platforms document their life, share struggles and highlights their achievements. By these they educate society about the discrimination faced by them and advocates for their inclusion. So social media supports in community building. Also, it enables them to stay informed about resources and current events, allowing her to better support her community and inspire others to strive for self-sufficiency. Despite its benefits, social media also exposes harassment and abuse. However, it enables them to overcome these challenges, using them as opportunities to grow and strengthen her resolve. Social media plays a crucial role in fostering community development for transgender individuals by providing platforms for connection, support, and advocacy. It enables them to build networks, share experiences, and access vital resources, creating a sense of belonging. Through social media, transgender individuals can amplify their voices, raise awareness about their struggles, and challenge societal stereotypes. The platforms also facilitate education and skill-sharing, empowering members to become self-reliant and uplift the community. Additionally, social media offers a space to advocate for rights and policies, driving meaningful societal change for transgender inclusion.



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