

# Examining Non-Binary Gender Discussions Online: How Digital Platforms Reshape Youth Identity and Reinforce Inequality in India

**Devika B S**

Research Scholar

Department of Political Science, Government College Kottayam,

Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala, India.

[devikabs19ninetyeight@gmail.com](mailto:devikabs19ninetyeight@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

Digital platforms intensify gender disparities to a much larger extent than in society. The study explores how gender binary stereotypes in digital space affect the Indian youth in navigating and forming their identities in the digital landscape by considering gender norms, gender-digital divide, segregation, and cyberbullying. The study uses a mixed approach. A qualitative analysis is employed, using secondary data collected from journal articles, research papers, books, and news reports. For the quantitative analysis, an online survey was conducted with closed-ended questions. The study found that while a percentage of teenagers question the status quo, some fall into discriminatory norms in society that algorithms have curated. This leads to the creation of fake social media accounts. The study reveals that technology not only perpetuates existing biases and injustices in society but also amplifies them through different means. This research examines the relationship between systemic violence facilitated by social media and algorithmic bias. Gender-based norms, through algorithms, silence non-binary voices from the digital space. The results reveal how gender-based discussions, prevalent in the online world, reinforce the orthodox societal norms.

**Keywords:** Youth identity, Digital Landscape, Gender non-binary, Gender-digital divide, Cyberbullying

## 1. Introduction

Digital spaces are becoming increasingly important for young people in India to shape their identity. India has one of the world's largest populations of digital users under the age of twenty-five. The Indian digital landscape symbolises a combination

of immense potential and persistent threats to its digital future. The use of digital technology among Youth from rural India is rapidly increasing, as revealed by the Comprehensive Annual Modular Survey (Press Information Bureau, 2024). The present study aims to investigate how gender binary stereotypes prevalent in society are embedded and perpetuated in digital architectures, online connections, and youth expression. Being the 131st among 148 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index, India's gender parity score has decreased since the previous year (World Economic Forum, 2025), signifying the entrenched disparities in health, education, politics, and the economy. Similar disparities are also evident in the digital arena, where digital access does not always translate into equity. Stereotypes entrenched in gender continue to influence how Indian youth live and engage with the digital space. This powers both their engagement and the formation of their identity. Even now, some individuals are religious the distinction between sex and gender. A group of individuals is prone to disagreeing with the existence of other genders aside from men and women, perpetuating the classical conception of the gender binary as the shapes of masculinity and femininity. 'Gender-continuum' is another way of understanding binary gender, and some examples, like dichotomous clothing, toys, or bathrooms, are the expression of gender stereotypes brought forth in the actual world (Kendall, 2023). Gender equality is defined as the ability to achieve equal rights, access, and participation for both genders in all aspects of society by ensuring equal value and opportunities (Thakur, 2019). Gender non-conforming youths are particularly vulnerable to offline and online violations.

## **2. Literature Review**

The literature review is organised thematically to provide an understanding of the existing literature in the field.

### **2.1 Identity and Youth Self-Expression in the Digital Landscape**

Erikson's psychosocial theory explains how digital media influence young people's identity development during the emerging adulthood and adolescence phases, as they are identity-forming stages. He refers to the tension phase of 'identity synthesis' and 'identity confusion' that the young people experience. He refers to it as the 'psychosocial moratorium,' a phase of life for experimentation without apprehension for long-term repercussions. The emergence of social networking sites, such as Facebook, has transformed the online world, where identities have become increasingly indistinguishable from those in real life. This emphasises recognizability and the avoidance of anonymous identities. Social media increasingly reflects offline relationships and social norms, with a significant amount of pressure being

placed on young people to project an idealised version of themselves online (Katie Davis, 2017). Šlerka and Merunková apply Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory to scrutinise how young people construct and produce their identity on Facebook and other social media sites. Their principal objective is to know digital self-presentation as a structured performance shaped by the needs of technology and audience expectations. Dramaturgical theory refers to the propensity to construct themselves in behaviours desired by society (Peter Kivisto, 2007). Profile pictures, status updates, and selective visibility are used to alter their identity. This may be an unintended or intended portrayal of them. Social media users may purposely reveal only a part of themselves. It highlights the continuous struggle between legitimacy and authenticity. The design of social media sites has a significant impact on the identity formation of young people. It is fundamentally performative and context-dependent. Turkle argues that "identity play" in online environments serves as a rehearsal area, where both children and adults can try on various aspects of themselves without consequences in the physical world. During adolescence, this digital exploration facilitates identity construction (Turkle, 1999). Access is only one aspect of the digital divide, and other issues like usage patterns, skills, and mentorship are overlooked. Having the ability to use digital applications does not necessarily make individuals digitally fluent. A lack of awareness about privacy and ethical usage is a significant issue. Instruction in digital literacy is thus essential. Boyd concludes that adult anxiety, social pressures, and structural biases are far more accountable for the complexity of teen digital life than is technology. There is a need for adults to guide teens as they navigate the digital universe, rather than dreading digital youth culture (Boyd, 2014). Digital sites enhance creative identity formation and expression, leading to "digiphrenia," where managing multiple online channels and constantly switching between the offline and online worlds results in psychological and emotional tension (Rushkoff, n.d.).

## 2.2 The Gender Digital Divide: Access and Participation

Gender is a socially constructed set of expectations and role assigners, which are imposed on women and men, monitoring their roles and actions within society. Transgender, non-binary, agender, genderqueer, two-spirit, and other categories are all encompassed within the umbrella of gender identity, which extends beyond binary categories. Gender sensitization is described as a long-lasting informative development that promotes gender-neutral elements. Gender mainstreaming is employed to evaluate and integrate gender perspectives into organizational policies and practices. Due to the organization of the family, most family members have easy access to information technologies. Youth utilize numerous social media platforms,

and gender here does not limit mere access to informational resources, yet it does not ensure equity. Young people acknowledged that gender discrimination remains rampant in the workplace, at home, and in schools and universities, despite equal access to digital tools. Especially in educational and work environments, men are often preferred in decision-making and receive more opportunities. While attempting to achieve equal levels, most youth acknowledge that gender discrimination continues to affect daily life significantly. Youths often think that the word “gender” is a term that is applied to instigate prejudice. Students acknowledge that men often remain the favorites in the real world, even though they believe all genders should have equal opportunities. Although smartphone usage is increasing, it indicates that simply 40.3% of young rural women possess smartphones, and most employ shared phones under male control and only 40.3% of female participants had a smartphone, while 87% of males did, and most shared it, especially in rural Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, in the study conducted in India(Asiya Islam, 2023). Male relatives often mediate and control women’s access, which reinforces patriarchal gatekeeping. Girls in traditional or rural families struggle to articulate themselves openly when they are restricted to limited and monitored access. They are defined by who manages their access as much as by what they can reach. They mentioned family constraints and lack of time, due to household duties, as the key obstacles to their lower and more scattered use of electronic devices. Self-efficacy in participating online, especially in public discourse, is affected by shorter usage time and parental monitoring, which limits perpetual interaction. The lower use of social media applications, such as Facebook and Instagram, by women indicates not just a lack of access but also a fear of losing their reputation and social status. Censorship by family members and misogynistic notions cause gendered silence and self-censorship in the internet world. Lower web presence debilitates the assertion of one’s digital identity by consolidating marginalization and invisibility. Lower-caste and lower-income rural women experience the greatest exclusion from access, ownership, and agency. This intersection of disparities suggests that online identity construction is stratified. Yet another form of digital exclusion is perpetuated by the pervasiveness of cell phones as the sole point of entry. The absence of diversity in devices restricts exploratory and learning-based creativity and identity play to casual, entertainment-oriented content(Asiya Islam, 2023).In India, Dalit and tribal girls have more limitations in the form of family conservatism and a lack of support in society. Limited autonomy, time use inequality, and social monitoring hinder genuine online activity. They resort to pseudonymous use, or self-censorship. Structural inequalities such as caste and socio-economic status further fuel this online gender gap.

### 2.3 Online Gender Discussions: Stereotypes, Harassment, and Algorithmic Bias

The findings echo a disconnection between online and offline feminist activism and discussions. Though participants subvert gender norms in the world outside Instagram and call themselves feminists, Instagram use gives priority to picture curation over advocacy of real-world issues. Several girls self-censor out of fear. A 2020 Cyber Peace Foundation analysis discovered that offences like bullying, voyeurism, and stalking contribute to a significant percentage of cybercrimes in India (Gender.Study, 2024). Cyberspaces continue to remain hostile environments for women and queer users. Almost 73 % of female journalists have been victimized through online abuse, and these range from unwanted messages to threats of bodily harm (The Chilling: A Global Study On Online Violence Against Women Journalists, n.d.). Most users do not participate in digital discussions. It deprives individuals of the opportunity to express their identity freely. The psychological implications of online violence are anxiety, identity repression, and social anxiety. Sexualization of the female body, sexual harassment of other genders, and gendered censorship are issues of serious debate. Social media platforms perpetuate gender bias and reward sexualized images of women. Stereotypes in society take shape in social media in this way. They claim their right to physical autonomy and self-expression. Instagram makes visibility and representation possible. Meanwhile, it also perpetuates gender stereotypes. It poses a dilemma. Digital platforms offer striking, informative, and interactive opportunities. However, their benefits are reduced by prevailing gender norms. By studying gender and society, one can understand how social norms regulate behavior and provide men and women with their distinct roles and values, frequently resulting in discrimination. Indian socio-cultural context for the youth identity construction reveals how digital spaces both test and replicate gender norms. It complements Šlerka and Merunková's findings by incorporating how gender intersects with digital identity (Mrs. Padmasri, 2019).

Male-dominated online content design marginalizes other gender narratives. Socialization is gendered, restricting girls' and LGBTQ+ youth's full participation in the digital world. Some youth participate fully, while others participate with limited involvement, and some are wholly excluded. Youth navigating non-normative identities or social insecurity are more likely to experiment online, often in pseudonymous spaces. The "Hashtag Generation", a generation of individuals brought up with the digital boom of social media, defines Instagram as an important social media site today. The identity formation of these users is dynamic and relational. It is constantly being shaped by peer recognition and audience acceptance through likes, comments, views, and shares. 'Instagram' encourages youngsters

to blur the boundaries between their personal and public lives. It forces them to change their appearance for online viewers. This supports neoliberal standards of performativity, autonomy, and physical attractiveness. Cyberbullying instances and low self-esteem are addressed more in females than in males (Ms. Sanya Gupta, 2025). Social media platforms often use ‘opaque inferential algorithms’ to scan user gender preferences. This further strengthens the existing discriminatory gender norms (Eduard Fosch Villaronga, 2021). These systems rely on biased data and gender binary classification only to misgender non-binary individuals. It further disseminates gender stereotypes. Users will be labelled against their will. That lands them in restrictive identity expression and underlies exclusion. Safiya Umoja Noble demonstrates how sexist and racist sentiments embedded in society are reproduced through search engines and social media platform algorithms, which are often regarded as neutral systems. The online experiences of Indian youth in overcoming cyberspace marginalization based on caste, gender, and class are highly associated with her concept of “technological redlining”, and based on this perspective, algorithmic curation through micro-targeting is a sociopolitical phenomenon and not a technical one (Noble).

### **3. Research Gap**

The current literature addresses digital access and participation, but downplays the extent to which gender stereotypes through algorithmic moderation, overtly redefine identity construction among Indian youth. While the digital divide is often described in terms of access to devices and connectivity needs, a deeper analysis reveals that digital inclusion is a complex practice influenced by interconnecting aspects of marginalization. The research concentrates on how current binary and non-binary gender stereotypes are hindering equal participation on the digital platform, and investigates how these stereotypes continue to perpetuate gender inequality on digital platforms through algorithmic curation, impacting youth identity formation.

### **4. Research Objectives**

To critically examine how binary gendered norms on digital platforms shape youth identity construction.

To consider how online community forums and platform algorithms support or subvert non-binary gender roles.

To look at social media platforms that promote or challenge non-binary gender through binary stereotypes.

To analyse instances of online abuse and how these influence the construction of gender-based identities among young people.

To propose policy frameworks for safer and equitable digital participation from non-binary genders and evaluate the effectiveness of current security measures.

## **5. Research Methodology**

The study uses a mixed approach. A qualitative analysis is employed, using secondary data collected from journal articles, research papers, books, and news reports. For the quantitative analysis, an online survey was conducted in July 2025, using closed-ended questions, with a total of 60 respondents. It employed a combination of purposive sampling. Respondents were youth from the 15 to 30 age group. The study employed convenience sampling, where the online survey primarily targeted individuals within my social network as the primary respondents.

## **6. Analysis and Interpretation**

### **6.1. Secondary Data Analysis**

Even if young women have access to digital devices, only a small percentage of them feel liberated while using their smartphones. In rural homes, women are under observation while using mobile phones. So, empowerment needs to go beyond providing access to the digital world. Numerous non-binary and female users testified that they have access to ordinary digital tools under time-limited terms and tracking. Most male users received unrestricted access. This indicates gender stereotypes in society, limiting the fair utilization of the digital realm. Under these limitations, their liberty to express themselves is curbed. Teens who identify as LGBTQ+ usually have two online accounts. One for family visibility and another anonymously. This creates a fragmented sense of identity and psychological stress and suffer from digiphrenia (Rushkoff, n.d.). There is a broad binary conceptualization of gender, denying those not suited in the realm's 'male' and 'female', individuals who are non-binary were misgendered in every instance by Twitter's inference algorithm (Eduard Fosch Villaronga, 2021).

Posts related to mainstream entertainment receive significantly more engagement than those related to feminist or LGBT issues. There are cases where users expressed that their content was continually hidden or deleted. Meanwhile, binary gender assumptions were reinforced through algorithmically favoring posts that complied with heteronormative standards. Doxxing and slut-shaming are just two examples of gender-based trolling that most social media users have observed. They respond by self-censorship, not standing up to the gendered violence of the online space. Others create support networks for one another or employ counter-trolls or memes as forms of creative resistance. Some youths are taking their social media platforms to engage in activism. They highlight matters like caste discrimination, LGBTQ+

rights, and internet safety. Young activists who engage in feminist, anti-caste, or LGBTQ+ online activism in India are subjected to harassment or shadow-banning. This confirms Noble's observation that algorithms prioritise saleable content over justice, and that sites like YouTube and Instagram favor creative identities at the expense of political content(Noble).

Greater identity affirmation and resistance to gender bias are demonstrated by youth who belong to positive social media communities. While the portion of youth exposed to gender stereotypes on online platforms is having their identity reconstituted, it is congruent with their offline lives. The #DigitalHifazat campaign on various social media websites was initiated to oppose violence against women in India in the virtual sphere(FII team, 2016), enabling youth to challenge gender stereotypes and exercise agency. Some online LGBTQ+ support groups aim to challenge gender binary rules and enable youth to freely discuss their experiences, like the 'Humans of Queer'(Molshree, 2021). Positive or negative gender norms in digital platforms have the power to influence youth identity formation. The 'Bois Locker Room' in India revealed the misogynistic nature of the social media platforms, which have the potential to reinforce and reconstitute harmful youth identities (Taskin, 2023).

Both positive and harmful gender norms in online platforms can shape youth identity formation. Due to structural, familial, and societal barriers, gender minority youths are disproportionately denied active digital participation despite massive digital access. Studies by groups like Sahodaran in Tamil Nadu have identified that transgender youths in urban slums don't have personal smartphones and internet access because of rejection by their family and economic marginalization. Even when they get access, they are under surveillance and interventions by 'Sahodaran' are needed to conduct a training programme (Balasubramanian, 2024).

The identity development of young girls and gender minorities is negatively influenced by online bullying. This leads them to abandon the platform or join with pseudonyms only. Thenmozhi Soundararajan, a Dalit activist, faced online caste and gendered abuse following her advocacy on Twitter and was uninvited by Google after initially inviting her (Kannan, 2022). There are other cases where individuals have been compelled to abandon social media platforms. Algorithmic curation through microtargeting favours traditional gender representations and excludes non-binary gender expectations. The algorithm on Instagram favors hyper-feminine or hyper-masculine representations and excludes LGBTQ material. Non-binary users' materials are not microtargeted.

The internet exacerbates all the forms of discrimination, and the response a woman gets when she raises some concerns is adverse, whereas for men it is otherwise, and Cathy O’Neil discovered in his study that the social media websites’ allotment to anti-harassment is lower, leading to the transmission of polarising content (Nandini Chami, 2021).

Several non-binary YouTubers also believed that their content was de-prioritised at some point. The lack of accountability in algorithmic curation primarily affects marginalised sections. Young individuals found that conforming to conventional gender behaviors was rewarded with visibility and validation, but deviance ended in policing and removal. This creates an internalized standard of expressing identity. Priyanshu Yadav, 16 years old, took his own life after being cyberbullied for applying makeup in India (Times of India, 2023). Rather than promoting varied gender expressions, online spaces reinforce current discriminatory norms. Scholars call for an inclusive, intersectional, and user-informed algorithmic structure that can transcend binary categories. Open, participatory processes are essential for creating respectful and just digital spaces that acknowledge gender as fluid and socially constructed.

## 6.2. Primary Data Analysis

The poll presents a paradoxical picture as the internet sites are both empowering and constraining. For the Indian youth, mainly those of non-conforming gender identities, the internet is a dominion of prospect and peril. Although access to technology is expanding, inclusion, security, and freedom of expression are not guaranteed. Harassment, censorship, and algorithmic discernment occur continuously. To transform these sites into inclusive spaces, educational institutions and digital firms must work together and address not only user behavior but also the unobserved arenas that perpetuate inequality.

**Table 1: Personal data collected from the Respondents**

Age Groups	Gender Identity	Educational Status	Location
15-18-13.3%	Female-45%	School student-8.3%	Urban – 60%
19-22- 30%	Male-30%	Undergraduate- 35%	Rural- 40%
23-26-25%	Non-binary-16.7%	Postgraduate-31.7%	
27-30-31.7%	Prefer not to say-8.3%	Working- 25%	

*Source: The data is compiled by the author from a primary survey conducted online (2025)*

The survey response rate of 25% (including non-binary and ‘prefer not to say’ respondents) is remarkable. It makes the information predominantly pertinent for learning gender expression and safety in the online space. An impartially balanced rural-urban combination places an emphasis on the topographical digital divide.

**Table 2: The respondents’ opinions on Gender Identity Expression, Online Safety, and Shadow Banning**

Access to a Personal device	Free to use true gender identity online	Have multiple social media accounts due to fear of Judgement or cyberbullying	Seen content that mocks non-binary identities	Experienced Shadow banning
Yes- 81.7%	Yes- 43.3%	Yes- 65%	Yes- 85%	Yes- 63.3 %
No -18.3%	No-56.7%	No- 35%	No- 15%	No -36.7%

Source: Compiled by author (2025)

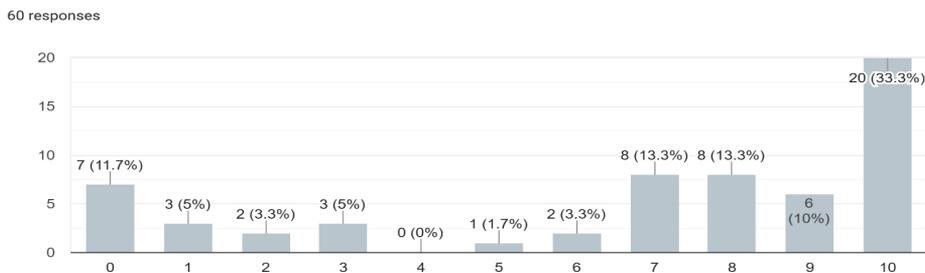
**Table 3: The respondents’ opinions on Digital Access, Self-expression, and Inclusivity on Social Media Platforms**

Freedom of Access	Social media usage frequency	Uses the real name/picture on their online platforms	Censor Oneself online	Family Restrictions on Online Activity	Supposed inclusivity in online spaces
Unrestricted- 56.7%	Daily-58.3%	Yes- 41.7%	Some-times- 46.7%	Yes- 31.7%	Partial-ly-61.7%
Moderately restricted- 26.7%	A few times /week- 28.3%	No-35%	Always- 35%	No -41.7%	Yes-20%
Restricted by Family- 16.7%	Rarely- 13.3%	Some-times-23.3%	Never- 18.3 %	Some-times-26.7%	No -18.3%

Source: Compiled by author (2025)

100% have access to digital devices and the internet, which was expected due to the online approach of the survey, yet control and surveillance are barriers. Digital platforms are not dispassionate spaces, wherein a noteworthy fraction of youth sense digitally regulated, leading to performative identities. Respondents witness platforms as biased, insecure, and organizationally unequal. Mockery and content restraint arbitrarily affect gender minorities and the feminist ability to speak.

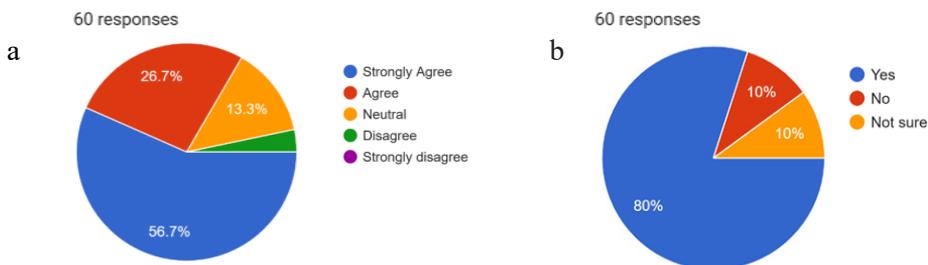
**Figure 1: Cyberbullying and Harassment Influencing Online Participation**



Source: Compiled by author

More than 43% of adolescents do not feel safe showing their real gender identity online. 35% confessed to having alternative accounts to guarantee they are not judged or cyberbullied. Even though technology empowers young people to connect and express themselves, it also subjects them to shadowing, which confines their freedom of expression.

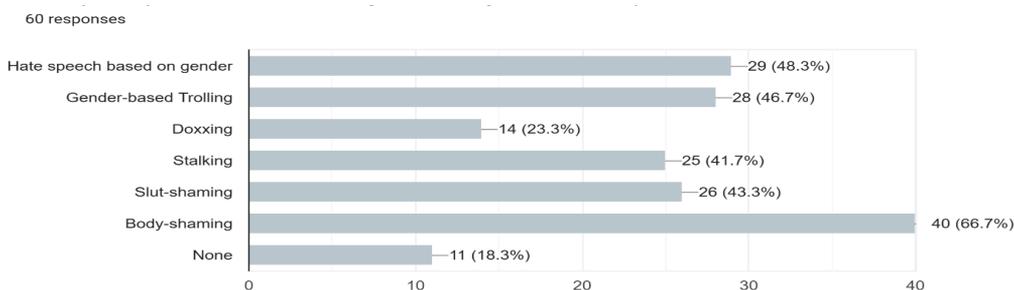
**Figure 2: Social Media Platforms: (a) Reinforcing Gender Roles and (b) Promoting Binary Gender Stereotypes**



Source: Compiled by author

As shown in Figures 2(a) and 2(b), most young people believe that online platforms worsen gender inequalities. Social media platforms are democratizing, but the data indicate that, unless moderated, they could set existing societal hierarchies.

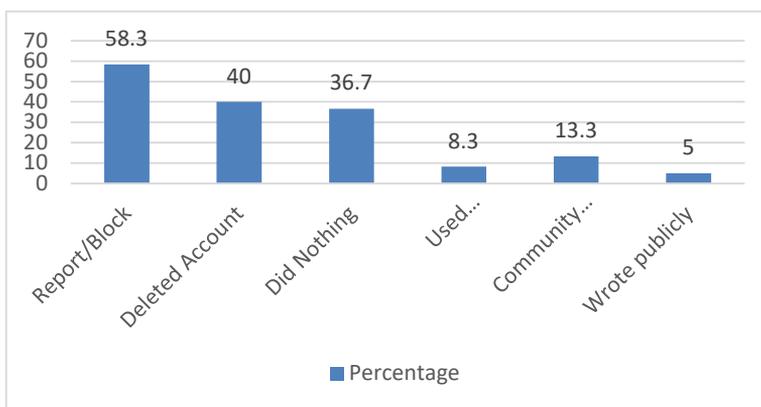
**Figure 3: The respondents' negative experience while using social media Platforms**



Source: Compiled by author

More than 4 out of 5 respondents experienced some online gender-based violence. This shows that these platforms are perilous spaces, primarily for non-conforming gender users. The sense of safety is further destabilized by fear of cyberbullying; more than 80% had witnessed posts encouraging gender stereotypes, and half said they had experienced body shaming, hate speech, or slut-shaming on the internet. The evidence that 46.7% of respondents occasionally self-censor online for fear of reprisals exemplifies how self-expression is muffled by cyber-aggression. Cyber-trolling based on gender, body shaming, and hate speech was disturbingly extensive. Almost half the respondents were victims.

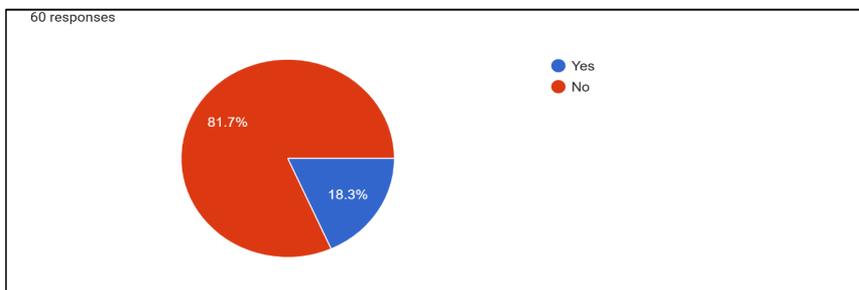
**Figure 4: Response to online harassment**



Source: Compiled by author

Much of this has no response in kind: 36.7% of harassed respondents took no action, and only 58.3% employed report and block functions. This passive or defensive reaction displays a distrust in platforms’ ability to protect, and perhaps an acceptance of such abuse. Reporting is standard, but deleting accounts and hushing oneself is also common, signifying a fear-driven disconnection. A majority depend on distinct coping mechanisms, and peer support is nominal.

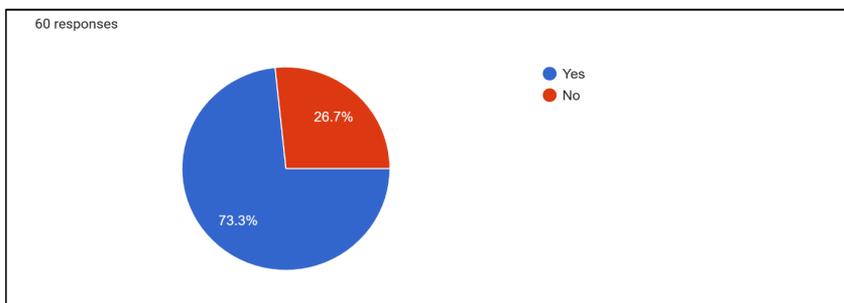
**Figure 5: The respondents’ opinions on treating all genders equally in the online space**



Source: Compiled by author

Over 60% of the contributors believed that online spaces are half as inclusive for all gender identities, and only 18.3% believed them to be completely inclusive. A very high percentage of people believe that social media platforms do not treat all genders equally. This disparity between the policies followed by social media and individual experiences is evident. It emphasizes the need for transparency and accountability in algorithm design.

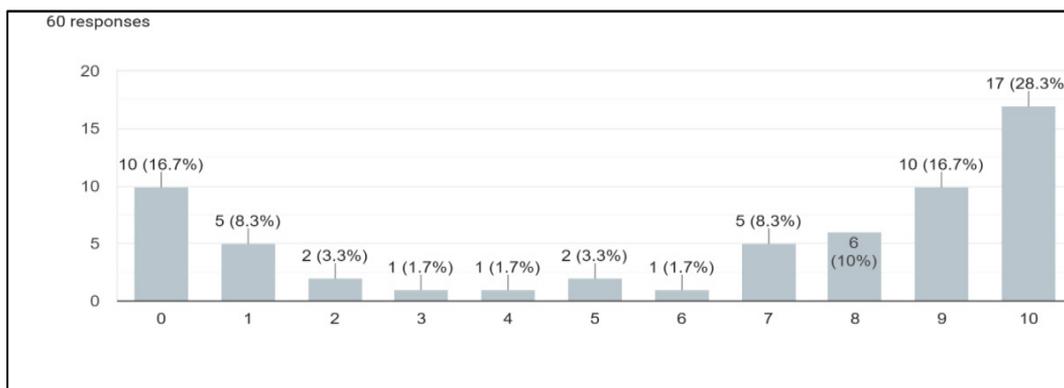
**Figure 6: The respondents’ views on feminist or LGBTQ+ content getting blocked or deleted**



Source: Compiled by author

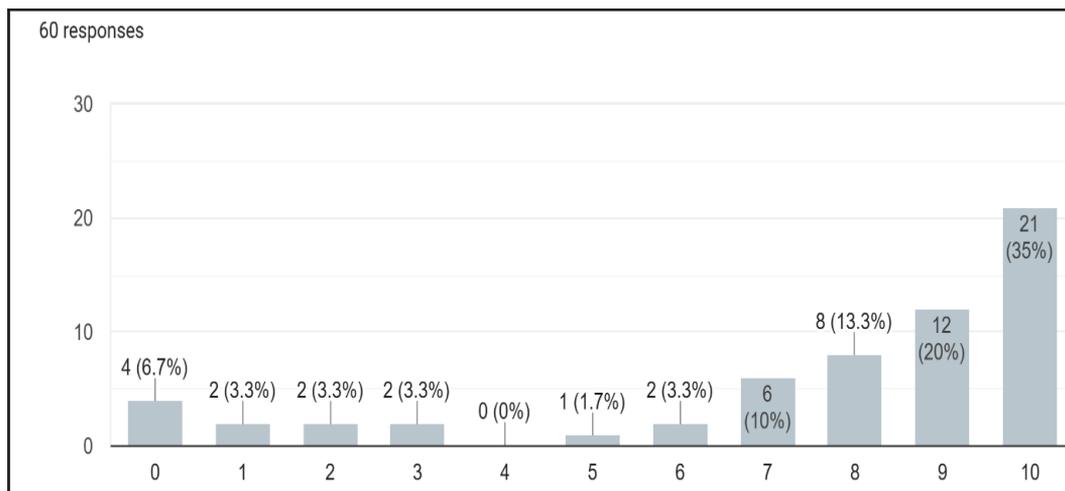
More than a third of participants saw algorithmic favoritism, with 26.7% stating that feminist or LGBTQ+ content had been deleted or blocked. 36.7% reported experiencing shadow banning. It is a phenomenon in which their content was quietly suppressed. These decisions signal systemic biases within the social media platform’s moderation, and the marginalized identities get disproportionately silenced.

**Figure 7: The respondents’ experience of online harassment affecting their participation**



Source: Compiled by author

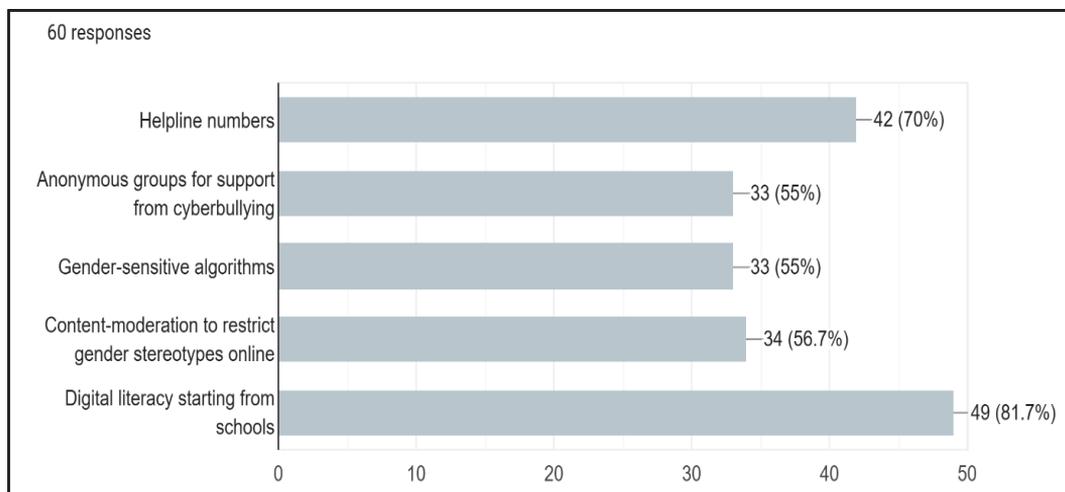
**Figure 8: The respondents’ experience of algorithmic favouritism online**



Source: Compiled by author

As shown in Figure 8, the respondents’ experience of online harassment significantly disturbed their participation. Moreover, more than 60% experienced a significant level of algorithmic favoritism online.

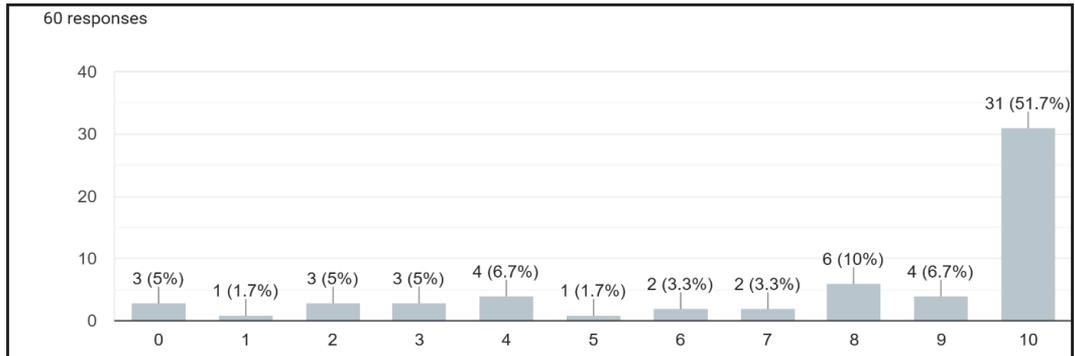
**Figure 9: The respondents’ coping mechanisms to feel safe online**



Source: Compiled by author

Participants required interventions. This included digital literacy classes from schools (81.7%), content moderation to censor gender stereotypes (56.7%), and the use of gender-sensitive algorithms (55%). Young people are not merely passive victims. They want structural changes to ensure that digital spaces are safer and more inclusive.

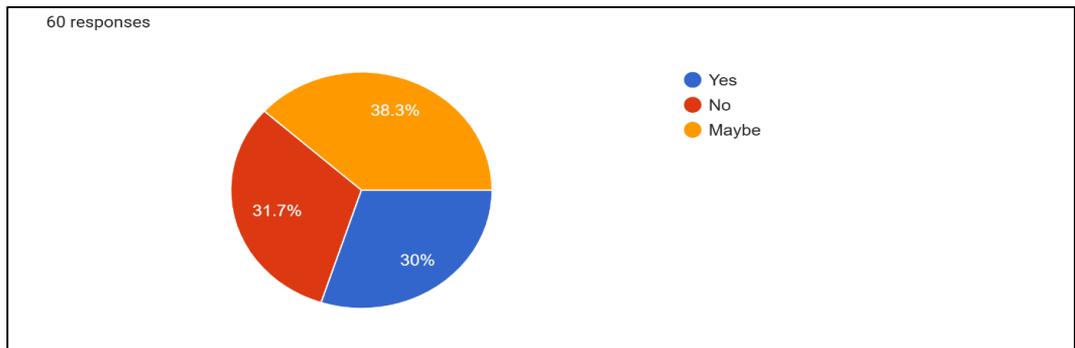
**Figure 10: The respondents’ opinion on increased gender disparity in digital platforms compared to society**



Source: Compiled by author

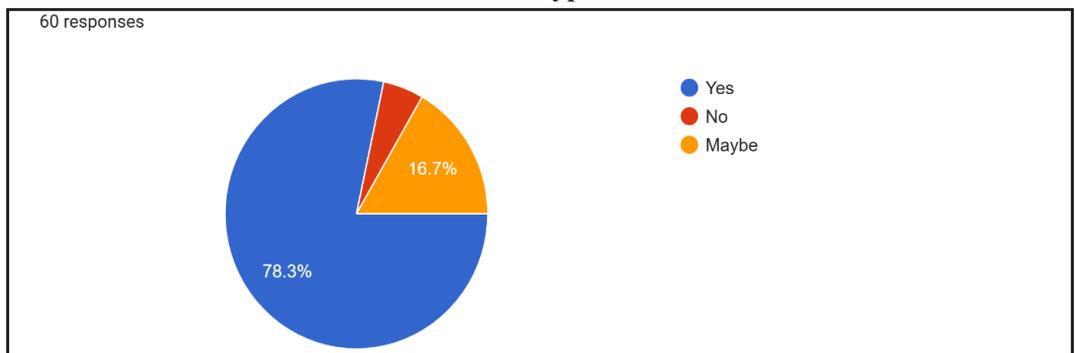
Youth opinion is that online platforms are amplifiers. They are not reductants of present patriarchal norms and gender hierarchies.

**Figure 11: The respondents’ awareness of anti-harassment policies on social media platforms**



Source: Compiled by author

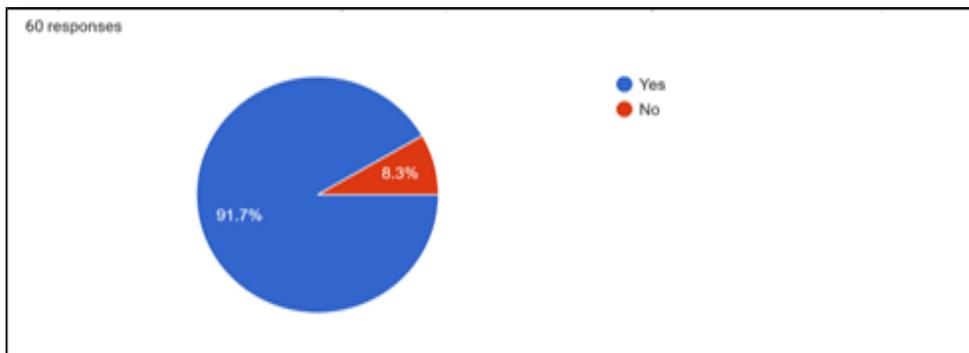
**Figure 12: The respondents’ views on Youth getting negatively influenced by gender-based stereotypes online**



Source: Compiled by author

With 78.3% positive that stereotypes based on gender hurt the conduct of youth on the internet, there is an evident demand for both cultural and technological alteration to counter these stories.

**Figure 13: The respondents' views on the importance of providing education on gender-sensitive online spaces in Schools/Colleges**



*Source: Compiled by author*

There was near-unanimity (91.7%) that schools and colleges need to offer education on gender-sensitive online behaviour.

## 7. Major Findings, Suggestions, and Conclusion

The design of social media websites primarily reinforces gender norms. Algorithms disdain activist or apt information that subverts gender norms. They prefer visually appealing, emotionally moving, and largely irrelevant content. Certain Youth with supportive online communities heavily generates stronger, more solid identities. They demonstrate a scuffle against prevalent gender bias and online bullying. While certain Youth, such as Girls and gender minorities, turn out to be disproportionately affected by digital disparity, apprehended as identity suppression.

Access is not the equivalent of inclusion. Girls and excluded genders often experience structural, cultural, and temporal limitations. Youth identities are fragmented due to the fear of being scrutinized and the limited prospects in society. Harassment makes individuals imperceptible in virtual space. Most among the youth pull out from online conversations because of the fear of cyberbullying. Social media websites only pay for appearance-based engagement. Ideological expression is not appreciated. Young people are dynamically sharing, provoking, and redefining digital gender norms despite the barriers. Context collapse is a significant problem in which digital expressions intended for one group inadvertently affect unintended witnesses, challenging the protective role of the psychosocial moratorium (Katie Davis, 2017).

States are supposed to apply reverse-engineer microtargeting tactics to counter the youth receiving similar information to the formerly held gender-biased content. Young women and gender minorities are often put in danger due to the psychological costs of the emotional labor of handling risky digital environments, as well as structural inequalities in access. Lessened spontaneous interactions and artistic expression are the effects of emotional vigilance as a managing strategy for dealing with platform hostility and surveillance. For instance, many participants spoke about withdrawing posts or comments in horror of being critiqued or misinterpreted. Emotional fatigue and identity repression are the consequences of complying with normative digital behavior. Forced to be politically neutral in sharing content or in sharing purely aesthetic content. The participants revealed multifaceted psychological effects. It ranges from anxiety and dissatisfaction to pliability and creativity.

Others actively withdrew from public spaces and opted for places that are encrypted and pseudonymous. While others reported feeling restricted. Pre-existing social boundaries are not erased by online engagement; instead, they are often armored. The type of information that is shaped and consumed remains largely determined by caste, economic status, and city of residence. Dalit and rural users risk marginalization or outright hostility, while urban, upper-caste youth may adopt activist rhetoric. The Indian digital environment is also a space of both possibility and risk for the construction of gendered youth identities. As digital spaces enable individuals to find and present things, these spaces also reproduce and reify the patriarchal and heteronormative standards present in society. The research focuses on a digital society where access prevails, even amidst the digital divide, yet there is no equality. Individuals are gaining visibility, and although it is empowering, it is also dangerous. Digital sites remake youth identities both voluntarily and through the exercise of control. For an entirely inclusive digital world, it is obligatory to transition from merely accessing to actively participating in making eloquent contributions. This necessitates an intersectional policy intervention. There is a requirement to reconstruct ethical online platforms with youth-focused online pedagogy.

It is only then that the digital world can expand from being an arena of observation to one of articulation and from alienation to empowerment. The social media post comments exhibit the common gender-based stereotypes that can shift the brain chemistry of youth in their perception of gender. Social media adoption and access inequalities are influenced not only by infrastructure but also by family control and gender roles. Performance is edited under terror, impacting the authenticity and development of an individual. Algorithmic biases favor normative selves and

set aside activism. Digital societies of youth are termed as the arenas of resistance and expression. When an individual has a fractured sense of identity, it is further compounded by algorithmic harassment, censorship, and the lack of safe online communities. However, changes are happening. The youth today are not solely victims but active agents, remaking online norms through art, humor, and solidarity. To best assist young people's identity formation in the digital environment, we must shift from merely granting digital access to facilitating digital equity, which entails:

Implementing policies to avert online harassment

Recommend school-level initiatives that emphasize digital safety and gender sensitivity.

Instruct educators and parents to support healthy digital engagement.

Impose gender-sensitive reporting procedures, content moderation teams, and harassment response processes for social media platforms.

Set up anonymous feedback and support networks for young people.

Offer device subsidies for young people who are marginalized.

Create community digital hubs with mentoring programs.

Support algorithmic transparency and third-party audits to track gender-based content suppression.

Support youth-led online platforms for free speech and creative engagement.

Invest in and support youth content creators from marginalized groups.

There ought to be Gender-Inclusive Digital Education through the integration of digital literacy and studies on gender into secondary school levels. They should also provide parents' workshops on ethical regulation and digital well-being. Digital platforms should be held accountable by providing transparency audits for their algorithmic choices. There should be a prerequisite gender-sensitive training for online content producers. There must be policy interventions that can facilitate device and data subsidies for marginalized youth and rural areas, and fund tech projects and open-source safety software. Support networks and studies need to be revitalized through funding allocation for youth-led digital rights movements, and increased emphasis on longitudinal research on digital identity, mental health, and resilience is necessary. To promote equal digital citizenship, a system change is necessary at the educational, technical, and policy levels. Only then can cyberspaces be inclusive, rather than tools of exclusion.

## 8. Ethical Declaration

For the online survey conducted as part of the study, participants provided their consent. Their responses remain anonymous.

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