



Digital Transphobia: Online Harassment and Trolling Against Transgender Persons

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ABSTRACT: The visibility of transgender persons on social media has been increasing recently and has created new possibilities for their self-expression, identity formation, community-building and public participation. However, at the same time, digital platforms have emerged as important sites for the reproduction of transphobia, where existing forms of stigma and gender-based discrimination are expressed through trolling, online harassment, misgendering, sexualised abuse, hate speech and threats. This paper examines online harassment and trolling faced by transgender persons in India through the analytical lens of what the author calls digital transphobia, conceptualised as the reproduction and reconfiguration of transphobic stigma, discrimination and gender regulation within digital spaces. Rather than treating online abuse as a series of isolated interpersonal encounters, the paper situates digital transphobia within broader structures of social exclusion and examines how digital spaces can reproduce existing inequalities while generating new forms of vulnerability. It further explores how digital transphobia affects transgender persons' participation and self-expression, particularly through self-censorship, restricted visibility and withdrawal from digital spaces. At the same time, transgender users are recognised as active agents who negotiate and resist digital transphobia through reporting, community support, counter-narratives and digital activism. The paper argues that digital transphobia is not simply an extension of offline prejudice into an online setting, but a reconfiguration of stigma through the particular affordances, interactions and governance structures of digital platforms. In this sense, the question of digital inclusion extends beyond access to technology or visibility online to whether transgender persons can participate with recognition, safety, agency and dignity. The paper therefore highlights the need to understand meaningful digital inclusion in relation to the conditions that enable or constrain transgender persons' participation in digital spaces.

KEYWORDS: Digital transphobia, transgender persons, social media, stigma, online harassment, trolling, digital spaces, exclusion and inclusion

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I. TRANSGENDER VISIBILITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The expansion of social media has altered the conditions under which transgender identities become visible, expressed and socially negotiated in India. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and other networked spaces allow transgender persons to present themselves in ways that are not entirely dependent on conventional media institutions or face-to-face social environments. This shift matters because transgender representation in India has historically been shaped by external forms of representation, often through stereotypes, sensationalism or limited understandings of transgender lives. Digital platforms create a different possibility, as they let transgender persons participate in producing or correcting the narratives through which they are seen. However, their visibility in online spaces does not necessarily translate into social acceptance, and being able to speak does not mean that they are being heard. Online spaces can expand possibilities for queer self-presentation and visibility while simultaneously privileging particular identities and forms of expression (Das, 2020). The question, therefore, is not simply whether transgender persons have become visible online, but what kinds of visibility become possible, recognisable and sustainable within digital platforms. Social media provides them an opportunity to articulate their identity on their own terms, but the conditions of that self-representation remain shaped by platform cultures, audiences and wider social norms. For transgender users, digital spaces serve functions that extend beyond self-expression. They can facilitate contact with others who share similar experiences, provide access to information, and create forms of community that may be difficult to establish in offline settings. According to Kanchan (2024), Instagram can function as a space for community-building,

identity expression, gender validation and political engagement. Digital spaces provide transgender persons with a platform where they can express their resistance (**Das, 2020**). At the same time, these possibilities are shaped by platform governance, content moderation, censorship and surveillance. Digital space, in other words, is neither simply liberating nor simply oppressive.

Social media enables users to present aspects of themselves that might remain invisible or difficult to articulate in everyday social environments. Photographs, videos, personal narratives, educational content, etc. can all become forms of identity expression. Such practices challenge the assumption that transgender representation must necessarily be produced by mainstream media, political institutions or other social actors. The transgender person becomes not merely the subject of representation but also a producer of representation. **Halder et al. (2026)** have described the online presence of transgender persons as “ambivalent visibilities”, capturing the fact that being seen online can simultaneously be empowering and precarious. Their visibility can provide recognition and challenge conventional gender norms, while also exposing them to moral policing, hostility and platform-based forms of control.

In India, politics of visibility is particularly complex because digital participation takes place alongside persistent inequalities in family life, employment, healthcare, education and public space. Online visibility cannot be understood as an isolated technological development. A transgender person who encounters discrimination offline does not enter social media as a socially neutral user. Existing experiences of stigma, gender policing and social exclusion can shape how much of oneself one chooses to disclose online, whom one trusts, and what kinds of interactions feel safe. **Pinch et al. (2024)** have found that transgender persons’ decisions about visibility and disclosure are impacted by their concerns about privacy, family circumstances and the possible consequences of being recognised. Transgender creators, activists and community members can respond to dominant representations, share everyday experiences and challenge assumptions about what transgender identity means. Such practices can contribute to what may be understood as alternative or counter-public forms of communication, where transgender persons create spaces for articulating experiences that are often absent from dominant public discourse. Yet the openness of these spaces remains conditional. Platform algorithms, moderation policies and commercial priorities influence which forms of content circulate widely and which are restricted, removed or rendered less visible. Digital platforms can enable transgender political expression while their systems of moderation and surveillance simultaneously constrain it (**Kanchan, 2024**).

Consequently, transgender visibility on social media should not be equated with inclusion. Visibility can provide recognition, community and opportunities for self-definition, but it can also expose transgender persons to audiences and forms of scrutiny that are difficult to control. The very act of making a transgender identity visible may invite questions, judgement, ridicule or attempts to invalidate that identity. This is where the concept of digital transphobia begins to emerge. Digital platforms can become spaces in which broader social assumptions about gender are reproduced, contested and intensified. The movement from visibility to vulnerability is therefore not necessarily linear, nor does vulnerability erase the possibilities offered by digital participation. A transgender person may experience social media as a source of affirmation and harassment at different moments, sometimes within the same platform or interaction. This ambivalence is central to understanding transgender digital experiences in India. Social media has expanded the possibilities for transgender persons to speak for themselves, find others, build communities and claim public presence, but the expansion of visibility has also created new conditions under which that presence can be challenged.

II. DIGITAL TRANSPHOBIA: EXTENDING STIGMA INTO DIGITAL SPACES

Digital transphobia can be best understood not as a completely new form of prejudice created by social media, but as an extension and reconfiguration of existing social attitudes towards transgender persons within digital environments. Transgender persons in India encounter stigma across family, educational, occupational, healthcare and public settings, and these experiences do not disappear when interactions move online. Rather, social media can provide additional spaces in which assumptions about gender, bodily conformity and acceptable identities are expressed and contested. **Yatirajula et al. (2024)** document interpersonal and structural forms of stigma, including rejection, ridicule, harassment and institutional discrimination. The movement of such inequalities into digital spaces therefore needs to be understood within this wider social context rather than as an isolated problem of internet behaviour. The concept of digital transphobia helps capture this continuity while drawing attention to what changes when stigma is mediated through technology. It may involve derogatory language, deliberate misgendering, deadnaming, sexualised comments, threats, ridicule, impersonation, non-consensual disclosure of information and other forms of targeted online abuse. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence in India, which includes trolling, cyberstalking, doxxing, non-consensual image sharing and other technology-mediated harms, are practices through which gendered inequalities can be extended or amplified online (**Lavalekar et al., 2026**).

Transphobia is a person’s dislike, discomfort, hatred, or prejudice towards transgender persons and includes negative feelings and discriminatory actions towards transgender persons. Digital transphobia, which is

prevalent in digital spaces such as social media, is also embedded in cisnormative assumptions, through which being cisgender is treated as natural, intelligible and socially unquestioned, while transgender identities are positioned as exceptional, deceptive, abnormal or in need of justification. Online interactions can reproduce these assumptions in seemingly ordinary ways. A comment questioning whether someone is “really” a woman or man, repeated demands to explain one’s body, or the refusal to use a person’s chosen name may appear less severe than an explicit threat, yet such practices collectively communicate that transgender identities are not entitled to the same recognition as cisgender identities. This is where **Goffman’s (1963)** understanding of stigma remains useful. Stigma operates through processes that reduce a person from a socially accepted individual to someone whose identity is treated as discrediting. Over digital platforms, the persistent and highly visible nature of online interaction can make stigma particularly difficult to contain. A hostile comment may remain visible to an audience far larger than the original interaction, while screenshots, reposts and algorithmic circulation can allow abusive content to travel beyond its initial context. The interaction is therefore no longer necessarily confined to the perpetrator and the targeted individual. It can become a public performance in which others participate by commenting, sharing, liking or simply witnessing the abuse.

The participants in a qualitative study by **Aldridge (2024)** described direct transphobic harassment through public posts and private messages, while some also encountered larger-scale or organised campaigns of abuse. Social media consequently appeared as both a source of community and a site where exposure to transphobia could become difficult to avoid. This implies that digital environments need to be examined as social settings in their own right. Repeated exposure to hostility can shape how transgender persons participate in digital environments. Sometimes transgender users limit their own online expression because of concerns about harassment, livelihood and surveillance. Digital transphobia, therefore, needs to be considered alongside the broader governance of digital spaces rather than treated solely as interpersonal hostility. There is also an important linguistic dimension to digital transphobia in India. Online hostility does not occur only in English, and the use of regional languages and code-mixed forms can make transphobic discourse difficult to identify through standard moderation systems. **Kumaresan et al. (2023)** have highlighted a lack of datasets to detect transphobic social media comments in Indian languages and have also developed datasets specifically designed to identify homophobic and transphobic content (especially comments) on social media in Hindi and Malayalam languages. Language is not simply a technical problem for content moderation. The words through which transgender persons are mocked, denied or sexualised are embedded in local cultural meanings and social hierarchies. A digital analysis that looks only for explicit English-language slurs may consequently miss significant forms of digital transphobic expression.

Sinha (2026) identifies outing, context collapse and online harassment as significant digital risks, demonstrating how information shared in one context can become accessible to unintended audiences. The boundary between online and offline harm is therefore porous. Digital harassment may affect employment, family relationships, physical safety and the willingness to seek help outside the platform. At the same time, it would be misleading to portray transgender users only as passive recipients of digital hostility, as digital platforms can offer forms of connection that may be difficult to find in offline settings, even as the same environments expose users to surveillance, censorship and harassment. The coexistence of these possibilities is central to understanding digital transphobia. Transgender persons do not simply enter a hostile digital world; they negotiate spaces that can be simultaneously supportive and unsafe.

Digital transphobia, then, should be understood as part of a broader process through which social stigma is reproduced, negotiated and sometimes intensified through digital technologies. Its significance lies not only in the offensive nature of individual comments or trolling episodes but also in what repeated exposure to such practices communicates about who is entitled to visibility, recognition and participation. When transgender users anticipate abuse, alter what they post, restrict their interactions or withdraw from particular platforms, harassment has consequences beyond the immediate encounter. It begins to shape the conditions under which transgender persons can participate in digital public life. This makes digital transphobia a question of social inclusion rather than merely online etiquette.

III. THE EVERYDAY FORMS OF DIGITAL TRANSPHOBIA: TROLLING, HARASSMENT AND ABUSE

Digital transphobia does not always appear in the form of explicit hate speech or direct threats. More often, it emerges through a series of seemingly ordinary online interactions that question, ridicule or undermine transgender identities. A comment beneath a photograph, a mocking response to a video, repeated misgendering, sexualised messages or an unsolicited demand to “prove” one’s gender may appear individually insignificant. Yet when such interactions are repeated, they produce a social environment in which transgender users are continually reminded that their presence is subject to scrutiny. Digital transphobia therefore operates not only through spectacular incidents of abuse but also through the accumulation of everyday forms of hostility. Trolling is one of the most visible forms of this hostility. Trolling directed towards transgender persons acquires a particular

significance as the target is someone whose gender identity challenges dominant expectations of masculinity and femininity. Gendered trolling can move beyond provocative or insulting comments into intimidation and threats (Pillai, 2022). For transgender users, such trolling involves ridicule of appearance, voice, body or mannerisms, alongside comments questioning the authenticity of their gender identity. The purpose is not necessarily to initiate a genuine disagreement. Often, the intention is to provoke, humiliate or make transgender persons feel that their participation itself is inappropriate.

The language used in such interactions is significant. Transphobic abuse frequently works by reducing a complex identity to a bodily characteristic or by portraying transgender identity as something deceptive, artificial or sexually deviant. Misgendering and deadnaming are particularly relevant in this regard. While they may sometimes be presented as mistakes or differences in opinion, their repeated and deliberate use can function as forms of identity invalidation. The refusal to recognise a transgender person's chosen name or gender does more than communicate disagreement. It places the authority to define that person's identity back in the hands of others. In a digital environment, this process can become highly public because such interactions are often visible to an audience beyond the immediate participants. Sexualisation is another recurring dimension of digital transphobia. Transgender women, in particular, may be subjected to comments that reduce their identities to their bodies or perceived sexuality. This can take the form of unsolicited sexual propositions, sexually explicit messages, degrading comments about bodies, or assumptions about sexual availability. Such interactions are not simply offensive expressions directed at individuals; rather, they reflect a broader tendency to make transgender bodies available for public scrutiny and commentary. According to Sinha (2026), digital platforms can expose users to outing, context collapse and online harassment, particularly where online and offline identities overlap.

Another feature of digital transphobia is its capacity to move between public and private spaces. Harassment may begin in the comment section of a public post and continue through direct messages, or an individual may be approached privately after becoming visible on a platform. The distinction between public and private abuse therefore becomes increasingly unstable. A hostile message may not be publicly visible, but its effects can nevertheless be significant, particularly when it contains threats, sexualised abuse or attempts to reveal personal information. Lavalekar et al. (2026) identify practices such as cyberstalking, trolling, doxxing, non-consensual image sharing and gendered disinformation as interconnected forms of digital harm prevalent in India. These practices demonstrate that online harassment is not limited to unpleasant speech. Digital technologies can be used to expose, monitor, intimidate and control. The possibility of repetition further distinguishes digital harassment from many offline encounters. A person may encounter a single hostile individual in an offline setting and physically leave that interaction. Online, however, abusive content can remain accessible, be repeatedly encountered, or be circulated to new audiences. The persistence and replicability of digital content can consequently extend the duration of an abusive encounter. This is particularly consequential for transgender users whose public profiles may be connected to their employment, activism, family relationships or community networks. What begins as an insulting comment can acquire a wider social significance when screenshots are circulated or personal information is made available to unintended audiences. Sinha (2026) illustrates this problem through the concept of context collapse, where information or content produced for one audience becomes visible to another unintended audience. For transgender persons, the consequences can be especially serious where online visibility intersects with family, employment or community relations. A photograph, personal disclosure or gender identity that is carefully managed within one social context may become available in another without the person's consent.

The scale of harassment can also vary considerably. Some interactions remain at the level of individual insults of transgender persons, while others involve repeated attacks on them from several accounts or coordinated campaigns. This distinction matters because organised harassment can transform the experience from an unpleasant encounter into a sustained attempt to silence or displace a person from a digital space. The digital environment can therefore become an extension of existing relations of power rather than a separate sphere detached from offline social life. At the same time, not every negative interaction should automatically be classified as digital transphobia. Disagreement, criticism and even offensive speech can have different meanings depending on their context, intent and repetition. A sociological analysis needs to retain these distinctions because otherwise the category of digital transphobia becomes so broad that it loses explanatory value. What makes an interaction transphobic is not simply that it is unpleasant or directed towards a transgender person. It is the way gender identity becomes the basis for humiliation, exclusion, delegitimisation, surveillance or violence. This distinction also helps move the focus of the discussion from individual sensitivity towards the social processes through which certain identities become legitimate targets of abuse.

Language further complicates the problem in the Indian digital context. Transphobic expression is not confined to English-language slurs. It may involve regional-language insults, code-switching, sexualised expressions, culturally specific forms of ridicule or indirect references that are difficult for automated moderation systems to recognise. Research developing datasets for the detection of homophobic and transphobic content in Indian languages such as Hindi and Malayalam illustrates the extent to which linguistic context matters in

identifying online hate (**Kumaresan, 2023**). The problem is therefore partly technological, but it is also sociological. The meanings attached to particular words, insults and expressions emerge from local histories and social relations and cannot always be captured through universal categories of “hate speech”. These everyday forms of abuse also reveal why digital transphobia should not be reduced to a problem of individual incivility. When transgender users repeatedly encounter ridicule, misgendering, sexualisation or threats, the cumulative effect is to make participation more difficult. The issue is not simply whether a person can technically create an account, upload content or comment on a post. It is whether they can participate without continually having to defend the legitimacy of their identity. In this sense, harassment affects the quality of their digital participation itself.

Transgender users continually negotiate the boundaries of visibility and safety. They are not merely passive recipients of interactions in digital spaces. Blocking, reporting, restricting comments, changing privacy settings, using alternative accounts, seeking community support and publicly challenging abusive narratives are all ways of negotiating hostile digital environments. The decision to remain visible despite harassment can itself constitute a form of resistance. Conversely, choosing silence or withdrawal does not necessarily indicate passivity. It may represent a practical strategy for protecting oneself from escalating abuse. Digital transphobia therefore operates through a spectrum ranging from everyday ridicule to sustained harassment, exposure and threats. Its forms may differ, but they share a broader function: regulating who can appear publicly, under what conditions, and with what degree of legitimacy. The next section examines this regulatory dimension more closely by considering how transgender bodies and identities are policed online, particularly through attempts to question authenticity, enforce gender norms and control transgender self-representation.

IV. ONLINE POLICING TRANSGENDER BODIES AND IDENTITIES

Digital transphobia is not confined to abusive language or overt hostility. It also operates through more subtle attempts to regulate how transgender bodies and identities should appear, behave and become recognisable online. Social media has made self-representation considerably easier, but it has not removed the social expectations through which gender is judged. Instead, these expectations can become embedded in the technological systems through which people are identified, categorised and made visible. The question, therefore, is not simply whether transgender persons are allowed to speak online. It is also whether they are recognised as legitimate gendered subjects when they do so. One of the most persistent forms of this regulation is the demand for gender authenticity. Transgender persons may encounter questions about whether they “really” belong to the gender with which they identify, whether their appearance is sufficiently masculine or feminine, or whether their bodies conform to conventional expectations of gender. Such questioning reflects a broader social assumption that gender should be immediately recognisable through the body. **Ranade et al. (2025)** illustrate how ideas of biological determinism and “trans normativity” influence professional understandings of transgender identity, sometimes producing forms of gatekeeping.

Social media can reproduce this logic through visual culture. Photographs, videos and other forms of self-presentation invite audiences to evaluate bodies, clothing, voices and mannerisms. A trans woman who does not conform to conventional ideals of femininity, for example, may be told that she does not “look like a woman”, while a trans man may be judged according to expectations of masculine appearance or behaviour. Such online interaction can turn the transgender body into an object of collective inspection. **Gnana Sanga Mithra & Bhavan’s (2025)** study argues that the relative invisibility of trans men in Indian media is connected to deeper structural assumptions surrounding masculinity. Their representation in social media is shaped not only by whether transgender persons are present in media but also by which forms of gender identity become intelligible within dominant representations of masculinity. Digital platforms may increase the number of transgender persons who are visible, but visibility remains structured by existing ideas about which bodies and identities appear convincing, desirable or socially acceptable. Technology itself can further complicate this process. In their study on algorithmic gender classification, **Fosch-Villaronga et al. (2025)** examined gender-classification systems on X and found that automated systems can misclassify users and that LGBTIQ+ individuals face significantly higher risks of misidentification. This is analytically important because it moves the discussion beyond interpersonal transphobia. A person does not have to encounter an openly hostile individual to experience gender misrecognition. A technological system can itself reproduce assumptions that gender is binary, stable and inferable from available data. The politics of identification becomes even more complicated in India because digitalisation increasingly intersects with access to welfare, documentation and public services. **Brindaalakshmi (2025)** demonstrates how difficulties in changing names and gender markers across identification systems can reproduce marginalisation even within a supposedly inclusive digital welfare architecture.

The policing of identity may extend beyond ordinary users to the platforms themselves. **Kanchan (2026)** examines how trans users in India negotiate the interaction between community-building and platform governance. Her findings suggest that algorithmic moderation, content restrictions and the political economy of platforms can constrain trans forms of expression, even when those platforms provide important spaces for

community formation and gender validation. What emerges here is a more complicated understanding of digital power. Transgender identities are not regulated only by people who dislike them. They are also mediated through technological infrastructures whose rules determine what can be posted, circulated, recommended, restricted or removed. This raises an uncomfortable question about the meaning of digital inclusion. If transgender persons are technically able to access a platform but must continually modify their self-presentation to satisfy its categories, moderation systems or audience expectations, can that participation really be described as inclusive? Access alone is an inadequate measure. Inclusion also requires recognition. A platform may provide a transgender user with the ability to create an account while simultaneously reproducing conditions in which their identity is questioned, misclassified or rendered less visible.

The regulation of transgender identities online should therefore be understood as a struggle over recognition and authority. Who has the power to define a person's gender? Who decides whether a body is sufficiently masculine or feminine? Who determines which identities can be accommodated within technological categories? And what happens when a person's self-identification conflicts with the assumptions of an audience, an algorithm or an institutional database? These questions move the discussion beyond individual instances of trolling and towards the deeper structures through which gender becomes socially intelligible online. Seen in this way, digital transphobia is not simply a problem of offensive content. It is also a problem of gendered recognition. Transgender persons may be visible online while still being denied recognition on their own terms. They may be able to speak while others claim authority over what their speech means. They may be represented while their bodies continue to be treated as objects requiring explanation or verification. The contradiction between visibility and recognition is therefore central to understanding digital transphobia.

This contradiction has consequences beyond the immediate online interaction. When users anticipate that their bodies will be scrutinised, their identities questioned or their self-presentation misinterpreted, they may begin to modify what they share, whom they interact with and how publicly they identify themselves. Digital participation then becomes a process of continuous risk management.

V. CONSEQUENCES OF DIGITAL TRANSPHOBIA: SELF-CENSORSHIP, WITHDRAWAL AND WELL-BEING

The impact of digital transphobia lies not only in the emotional distress of transgender persons but also in their gradual reshaping of everyday digital participation. **Maji & Abhiram (2023)** found that cyberbullying, including verbal aggression, sexual harassment and attacks on sexual identity, was associated with anger, sadness, shame, anxiety, sleep difficulties and reluctance to socialise. The study also identified active responding, psychological disengagement and technological blocking as common coping strategies. They also established a significant negative relationship between cyberbullying and mental health. For transgender persons in India, these effects need to be situated within an already unequal social environment. **Sarika et al. (2025)** identified stigma and discrimination across family, community, organisational and societal contexts as important contributors to psychological distress among transgender persons in India, with anxiety, depression and suicidality appearing across the reviewed literature.

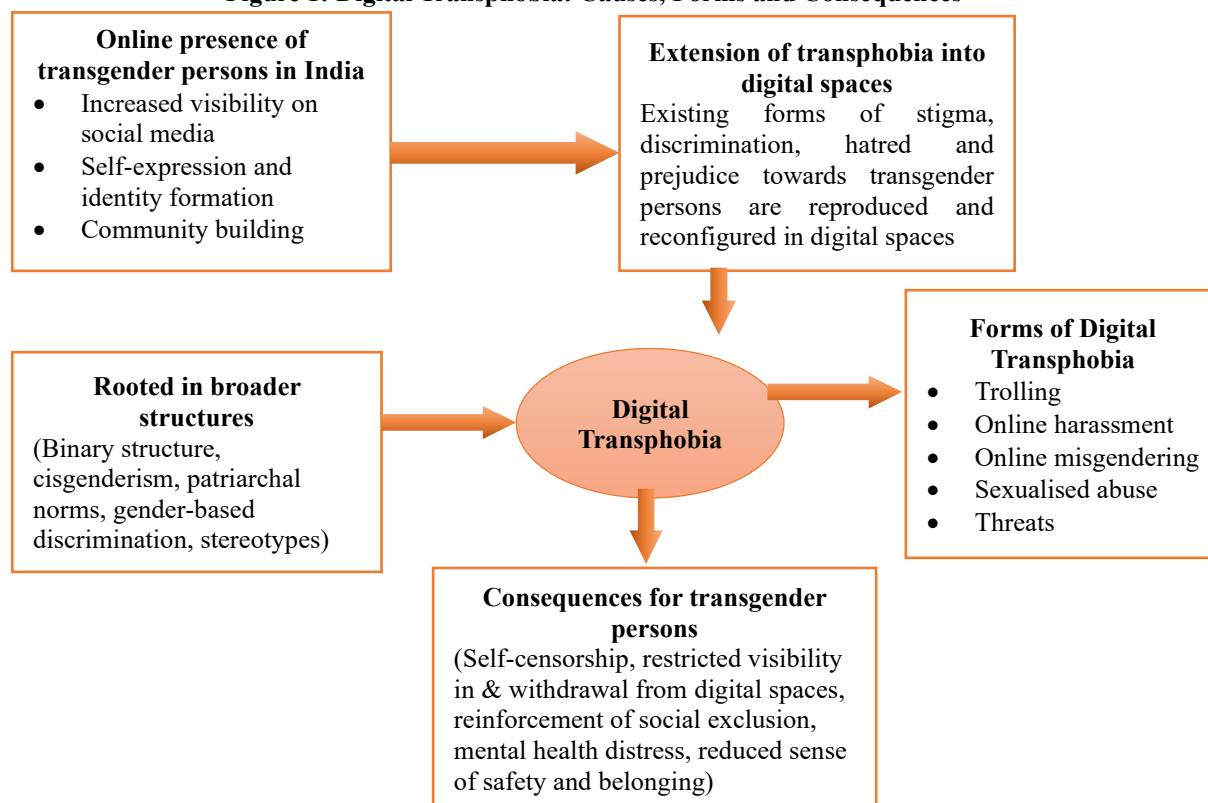
One important consequence of digital transphobia is self-censorship. Transgender persons may become more cautious about photographs, personal disclosures, discussions of gender identity or interactions with unfamiliar users when they anticipate negative reactions. **McInroy et al. (2026)** suggest that discriminatory online experiences can affect not only emotional well-being but also how comfortable young people feel discussing and expressing their identities. **McInroy et al. (2026)** in their study of queer young people, similarly found that both directly experiencing and witnessing digital microaggressions could affect emotional, physical and behavioural well-being, as well as feelings about being queer. The significance of such findings lies in the cumulative nature of these experiences. A person does not have to be threatened every time they go online for the possibility of harassment to influence what they are willing to say or show.

This can gradually produce a form of constrained visibility. Blocking abusive accounts, restricting comments or making an account private may be sensible protective strategies, but they can also narrow the possibilities for public participation. Withdrawal, therefore, should not automatically be interpreted as passivity. It may be an active strategy for protecting oneself. The concern arises when transgender persons have to restrict their participation because the alternative is repeated exposure to hostility. What appears as individual self-protection can then reveal a wider failure of the digital environment to provide equal conditions of participation. At the same time, withdrawal from social media can involve its own costs. Digital platforms can provide transgender persons with access to information, peer support and opportunities for identity exploration that may be difficult to obtain offline. **Bacaj et al. (2025)** identify the dual role of digital platforms in mental health, identity development and civic engagement. This duality is particularly visible in India. **Brar et al. (2026)** demonstrated the feasibility of using Instagram and WhatsApp to provide mental-health information and peer-orientated support to transgender persons experiencing mild anxiety and/or depression. Social media, therefore, cannot simply be

understood as a source of harm. The same digital environment that exposes transgender persons to hostility can also become a source of support and well-being.

The central issue, therefore, is not whether transgender persons continue to use social media after experiencing digital transphobia. Many do, precisely because digital spaces remain important to their social and personal lives. The more significant question is what kind of participation remains possible. If transgender users must continually monitor their speech, appearance, disclosures and interactions to avoid harassment, formal access to digital platforms may coexist with substantive exclusion. Digital transphobia consequently affects well-being not only by causing individual distress but also by making ordinary participation more uncertain, cautious and socially costly. The causes, forms and consequences of digital transphobia have been depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Digital Transphobia: Causes, Forms and Consequences



VI. NEGOTIATING AND RESISTING DIGITAL TRANSPHOBIA

Transgender persons develop different strategies to negotiate and resist transphobic environments, including blocking abusive users, reporting harmful content, restricting account visibility and relying on supportive online communities. Such practices allow them to exercise some control over how they participate in digital spaces. Recent research on queer and transgender digital communities also suggests that social media can facilitate counter-narratives, collective identity and political expression, allowing marginalised users to challenge representations imposed upon them (Kanchan, 2024, 2026; Are et al. 2025; Ali et al. 2025). Resistance, however, does not always take the form of openly confronting abuse. Continuing to create content, speak about transgender issues, share personal experiences and maintain community connections can itself challenge the pressures that seek to make transgender identities less visible. At the same time, the burden of managing harassment should not be placed entirely on transgender users. Meaningful digital inclusion requires stronger platform accountability, responsive moderation and mechanisms that recognise the particular forms of gendered abuse faced by transgender persons. The possibility of resistance therefore exists alongside an important structural question: why should marginalised users have to continually defend their right to participate in spaces that are presented as open to everyone?

VII. CONCLUSION

Digital transphobia reveals that access to digital spaces does not automatically translate into digital inclusion for transgender persons. Social media may provide opportunities for visibility, self-expression and community formation, but these possibilities remain constrained when transgender users encounter misgendering, trolling, sexualised abuse, harassment, threats and other forms of identity-based hostility. Digital transphobia

therefore needs to be understood not simply as individual online abuse but as a mechanism through which broader forms of stigma, cisnormativity and social exclusion are reproduced within digital spaces. Its consequences extend beyond individual encounters, shaping how safely and freely transgender persons can participate, represent themselves and interact online.

Social media does not merely give voice to transgender persons; rather, it reorganises the conditions under which their voice becomes recognised, amplified or erased. Digital inclusion, therefore, cannot be reduced to having internet access, a social media account or the ability to produce online content. It must also involve the ability to participate without being systematically subjected to identity-based harassment, misrecognition and exclusion. When transgender users have to censor themselves, restrict their visibility, withdraw from conversations or constantly defend the legitimacy of their identities, formal access to digital platforms exists alongside substantive exclusion from them. At the same time, transgender persons are not passive recipients of digital transphobia. They negotiate hostile environments through blocking, reporting, privacy practices, community-building, counter-narratives and digital activism. These practices demonstrate the possibility of agency and resistance, but they also raise a broader question about where the responsibility for digital inclusion should lie. The burden cannot rest entirely on transgender users to protect themselves from environments that reproduce discrimination. Meaningful digital inclusion requires platforms and institutions to address the structural conditions that enable digital transphobia, including inadequate moderation, discriminatory technological systems and the normalisation of gender-based hostility. The central challenge, therefore, is not merely to make transgender persons visible online but to create digital spaces in which such visibility can be sustained with recognition, safety, dignity and equal participation.

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