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Dhiman, Bharat

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# **Impact of Social Media Platforms on LGBTQA+ Community: A Critical Review**

**Dr. Bharat Dhiman, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication & Media Technology, J.C. Bose University of Science and Technology, YMCA, Faridabad, Haryana, India**

## **Abstract**

This review paper highlights that Social media platforms have both negative and positive impacts on the LGBTQA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Asexual, and other non-heterosexual and non-cisgender identities) community. While social media have provided a space for increased support, advocacy, and visibility, they have also been used as a tool for harassment and discrimination. Social media companies need to ensure the safety and well-being of their users, particularly those from marginalized communities. This review article discussed how Social media platforms have allowed for greater visibility and representation of the LGBTQA+ community. Social media platforms have provided a platform for the LGBTQA+ community to raise awareness about the stigma and discrimination they face. This includes sharing personal stories and experiences, advocating for their rights, and calling out discriminatory behavior.

**Keywords:** LGBTQA+, Social Change, Social Media, Communication, New Media

**Themes:** LGBTQA+ and Power, and LGBTQA+ and Decision-Making

### **Introduction to Social Media Platforms:**

Social media platforms are online applications and websites that allow users to share, exchange and create content, engage with others, and build social networks. Social media platforms have become an essential part of our lives, with billions of people using these platforms to connect with others, share information, and stay updated on news and events [1]. The history of social media platforms dates back to the early days of the internet when bulletin board systems (BBS) were used

to communicate with others. However, the modern era of social media began with the launch of platforms like MySpace and LinkedIn in the early 2000s. Since then, social media has grown exponentially, with new platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram emerging and becoming famous [1].

One of the significant features of social media platforms is the ability to create and share content. Users can upload text, images, videos, and other media to their profiles or pages [1]. They can also interact with others by commenting, liking, and sharing their content. This has made it easy for people to share information and connect with others who share similar interests.

Another essential feature of social media platforms is the ability to build social networks. Users can connect with other users by sending friend requests, following their pages or profiles, and joining groups or communities. It has made finding and connecting with people with the same interests or identities easier [2].

Social media platforms have also had a significant impact on the way people consume news and information. With the rise of social media platforms, many people now get their news and information from these platforms rather than traditional media sources [2]. This has led to concerns about spreading misinformation and fake news, as social media users can easily share and amplify false information [2].

In addition to these benefits, social media platforms have also been associated with several negative effects. One of the most significant concerns is the impact of social media on mental health. Many studies have shown that excessive use of social media can lead to increased feelings of depression, anxiety, and loneliness [3]. This is thought to be due to the constant comparison to others and the pressure to present a perfect image on social media.

Another concern is the impact of social media on privacy and security. Social media platforms often collect and store large amounts of user data, which can be used for targeted advertising and other purposes. This has raised concerns about the misuse of this data and its potential to be accessed by malicious actors or hackers [3].

Social media platforms have also been associated with the spread of cyberbullying, hate speech, and other forms of online harassment. The anonymity of social media can make it easier for people

to engage in this type of behavior without fear of consequences, which can hugely impact the mental health and well-being of the individuals targeted [4].

Social media platforms have become integral to our daily lives, providing a space for people to connect with others, share information, and build social networks. However, they have also been associated with several negative effects, including spreading misinformation, mental health concerns, privacy, and security issues, and spreading hate speech and online harassment. Individuals and social media companies need to be aware of these issues and work towards creating a safer and more positive online environment [4].

### **History of Social Media Platforms:**

Social media platforms have a relatively short history, with the first social networking site, Six Degrees, launching in 1997. However, social media has rapidly evolved and become integral to modern communication and social interaction. Here's a brief history of social media platforms:

**Six Degrees (1997):** Six Degrees was the first social networking site launched in 1997. It allowed users to create profiles, make friends, and send messages.

**Friendster (2002):** Friendster was launched in 2002 and became popular in Asia. It allowed users to find new friends based on shared interests and connect with existing friends.

**MySpace (2003):** MySpace became one of the most popular social media platforms in the mid-2000s. It allowed users to create customizable profiles, connect with friends, and discover new music.

**Facebook (2004):** Facebook was founded in 2004 and became one of the world's most popular social networking sites. It allowed users to connect with friends and family, share photos and videos, and join groups and events [4].

**Twitter (2006):** Twitter was launched in 2006 and allowed users to send short messages called tweets. It quickly became popular among celebrities, politicians, and journalists.

**Instagram (2010):** As a photo-sharing app, Instagram was launched in 2010. It allowed users to share photos and videos with their followers and became popular among influencers and businesses.

**Snapchat (2011):** Snapchat was launched in 2011 as a messaging app that allowed users to send photos and videos that disappeared after a short time. It became popular among younger users [2, 3].

**TikTok (2016):** TikTok was launched in 2016 as a short-form video-sharing app. It became popular among younger users and quickly became one of the world's most popular social media platforms. Today, social media platforms have become an integral part of our daily lives, and new platforms are constantly emerging, changing how we communicate and interact.

### **Objective of the Study:**

- To highlight the Impact of Social Media Platforms on the LGBTQA+ Community
- To highlight how Social media platforms have allowed for greater visibility and representation of the LGBTQA+ community

### **Introduction to LGBTQA+ Community:**

The LGBTQA+ community refers to diverse individuals identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, asexual, and other non-heterosexual and non-cisgender identities. Members of this community have historically faced significant challenges and discrimination due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression [1, 2, 3].

Lesbian refers to women who are primarily attracted to other women, while gay relates to men who are mainly attracted to other men. Bisexual individuals are attracted to both men and women, while pansexual individuals are attracted to people regardless of gender identity. Transgender individuals identify with a gender different from the sex they were assigned at birth, and they may or may not undergo medical interventions to transition to their desired gender [1, 2, 3].

Queer and questioning are terms used to describe individuals who are exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity or who identify as something other than heterosexual or cisgender. Asexual individuals do not experience sexual attraction to any gender.

The LGBTQA+ community has a rich history of activism and advocacy, beginning with the Stonewall riots of 1969. This event, which took place in New York City, was a turning point in the struggle for LGBTQA+ rights and led to the formation of numerous organizations dedicated to advancing the rights of this community. Since then, significant progress has been made in many countries, including legalizing same-sex marriage and enacting anti-discrimination laws [1, 2, 3, 4].

However, despite these advances, members of the LGBTQA+ community continue to face significant challenges, including harassment, discrimination, and violence. Many countries worldwide still criminalize same-sex activity, and community members may face social ostracism or even physical harm for expressing their gender identity or sexual orientation.

As a result of these challenges, the LGBTQA+ community has developed a strong sense of solidarity and support for one another. Many organizations and groups have been formed to provide resources and support to members of this community, including legal aid, counseling services and advocacy groups. In addition, many individuals and allies work to raise awareness of the challenges facing the LGBTQA+ community and to promote greater understanding and acceptance [1, 2].

There has been increasing recognition of diversity within the LGBTQA+ community in recent years. This includes acknowledging the experiences of individuals who identify as non-binary or genderqueer and recognizing the intersectionality of identities such as religion, race, and socioeconomic status [1, 2].

Overall, the LGBTQA+ community is a diverse and vibrant group of individuals who have made significant strides in advancing their rights and increasing visibility and acceptance. However, there is still so much work to be done to address the challenges faced by this community and to promote greater understanding and acceptance for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Impact of Social Media Platforms on LGBTQA+ Community:**

Social media platforms have had a significant impact on the LGBTQA+ community. These platforms have allowed individuals to express their identities, connect with others, and find support. However, they have also exposed individuals to hate speech, discrimination, and cyberbullying.

One of the positive impacts of social media on the LGBTQA+ community is that it has helped individuals to come out and connect with other like-minded individuals. Social media platforms have provided a space for individuals to express their identities and connect with others who may be going through similar experiences. This has helped to create a sense of community and support for the LGBTQA+ community [1, 2].

Social media platforms have also helped to raise awareness of LGBTQA+ issues and promote activism. Many individuals and organizations use social media to share information, promote events, and raise funds for LGBTQA+ causes. This has helped to increase the visibility and understanding of the LGBTQA+ community and has played a significant role in advancing LGBTQA+ rights [4].

However, social media has also exposed individuals to hate speech, discrimination, and cyberbullying. LGBTQA+ individuals are often the target of online harassment and bullying, which can significantly impact their mental health and well-being. This has led to calls for better regulation of social media platforms and greater accountability for those who engage in hate speech and online harassment.

**Social media can have negative impacts on the LGBTQA+ community in several ways, including:**

**1. Cyberbullying and Harassment:** Social media can be a breeding ground for cyberbullying and harassment directed at members of the LGBTQA+ community. This can be threats, hateful comments and even doxxing (publishing someone's private information online). Cyberbullying and harassment can have a particularly harmful impact on the LGBTQA+ community. Community members may face discrimination and stigmatization daily, and online harassment can exacerbate these issues [1, 2, 5].

Some ways in which cyberbullying and harassment can specifically target the LGBTQA+ community include:

**Homophobic, transphobic, or biphobic comments:** LGBTQA+ individuals may be targeted with hateful comments and slurs about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Outing:** Cyberbullies may threaten to reveal an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity to others without their consent, which can be especially harmful if they are not ready to come out.

**Misgendering:** Some cyberbullies may intentionally misgender transgender or non-binary individuals, using incorrect pronouns or other gendered languages to belittle or degrade them.

**Revenge porn** refers to the non-consensual sharing of intimate images or videos online, which can be used for harassment and blackmail [5].

**Doxxing** refers to publishing someone's private information online, such as their home address or phone number. This can be especially dangerous for LGBTQA+ individuals who may already face threats of physical harm [2, 3].

These forms of cyberbullying and harassment can profoundly impact the mental health and well-being of LGBTQA+ individuals. It is crucial for social media platforms to take steps to prevent and address online harassment and for allies to speak out against discrimination and hate speech.

**2. Misinformation and Stereotypes:** Social media can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and misinformation about the LGBTQA+ community. This can lead to discrimination, marginalization, and stigmatization.

Some common examples of misinformation and stereotypes about the community include:

**The idea that being LGBTQA+ is a choice:** This idea ignores the fact that sexual orientation and gender identity are innate and cannot be changed by choice. It can lead to beliefs that individuals



can or should be "converted" to being heterosexual or cisgender, which can harm and invalidate LGBTQA+ individuals [3, 6, 7].

**The belief that being LGBTQA+ is a mental illness:** Despite decades of research demonstrating that being LGBTQA+ is not a mental illness, some individuals and organizations continue to promote this false idea. This can lead to harmful conversion therapies and other attempts to "cure" LGBTQA+ individuals [1, 2, 5].

**Stereotypes about LGBTQA+ individuals:** LGBTQA+ individuals are often stereotyped as flamboyant, promiscuous, and emotionally unstable. These stereotypes can lead to discrimination and marginalization and prevent individuals from expressing their true identities.

**The belief that LGBTQA+ individuals are more likely to be pedophiles:** This is a harmful myth that has been debunked by research. It can increase suspicion and fear towards LGBTQA+ individuals and contribute to discrimination and hate crimes.

**The idea that LGBTQA+ individuals threaten traditional values or the family unit:** This idea is often used to justify discrimination against LGBTQA+ individuals and can lead to policies restricting their rights and freedoms.

It is essential to challenge misinformation and stereotypes about the LGBTQA+ community and to promote accurate information and positive representations of diverse identities and experiences. This can help to promote acceptance and understanding and reduce discrimination and stigma [6].

**3. Discrimination and Censorship:** Some social media platforms have been criticized for discriminatory policies towards LGBTQA+ content. This can lead to censorship of LGBTQA+ voices and perspectives. Discrimination and censorship can have a significant impact on the ability of LGBTQA+ individuals to express themselves and live their lives without fear of discrimination or harm.

Some examples of discrimination and censorship faced by the LGBTQA+ community include the following:

**Employment discrimination:** LGBTQA+ individuals may face discrimination in the workplace based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, which can lead to unemployment, underemployment, and financial instability.

**Housing discrimination:** LGBTQA+ individuals may face discrimination in finding housing or securing a lease based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Healthcare discrimination:** LGBTQA+ individuals may face discrimination in accessing healthcare, including denial of treatment or unequal treatment based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Discriminatory laws and policies:** Laws and policies that restrict the rights and freedoms of LGBTQA+ individuals, such as bans on same-sex marriage or adoption by same-sex couples, can lead to discrimination and marginalization.

**Censorship of LGBTQA+ content:** Some social media platforms and other forms of media may censor LGBTQA+ content or limit its visibility, preventing individuals from accessing important information and resources related to their identities and experiences.

These forms of discrimination and censorship can profoundly impact the mental health and well-being of LGBTQA+ individuals. Individuals and organizations must advocate for policies and practices that promote equality and inclusion and challenge discrimination and censorship whenever possible [8].

**4. Pressure to Conform:** Social media can pressure individuals to conform to specific standards and expectations related to their sexual orientation or gender identity. This can significantly harm individuals still exploring their identities and may feel isolated or unsure. The pressure to conform to societal expectations can be particularly intense for LGBTQA+ individuals, who may

face discrimination and marginalization if they do not conform to traditional gender and sexual norms.

Some examples of the pressure to conform faced by the LGBTQA+ community include:

**Heteronormativity:** Society often assumes that individuals are heterosexual, which can lead to pressure to conform to heterosexual norms and expectations. This can include pressure to date or marry someone of the opposite gender or conform to gender roles and stereotypes [9].

**Binary gender expectations:** Society often assumes that individuals are male or female and that these genders correspond to specific roles and behaviors. This can lead to pressure to conform to binary gender expectations, which can be particularly difficult for individuals who identify as non-binary or gender non-conforming [10].

**Family expectations:** LGBTQA+ individuals may face pressure from family members to conform to traditional gender and sexual norms, leading to conflict and tension within families.

**Peer pressure:** LGBTQA+ individuals may face peer pressure to conform to gender and sexual norms, leading to isolation and loneliness [11, 29, 30, 31].

**Internalized homophobia/transphobia:** LGBTQA+ individuals may also experience pressure to conform from within themselves, as they may internalize negative messages about their identities and struggle with shame or self-doubt.

The pressure to conform can be a significant source of stress and anxiety for LGBTQA+ individuals, leading to depression, isolation, and low self-esteem. Individuals and organizations must promote acceptance and understanding of diverse identities and experiences and challenge societal norms and expectations that lead to discrimination and marginalization.

**5. Lack of Representation:** Despite the growing visibility of LGBTQA+ individuals in media and popular culture, social media can still be lacking in representing diverse voices and experiences within the community. This can lead to feelings of invisibility or marginalization. Lack of

representation can be a significant issue for the LGBTQA+ community, leading to feelings of invisibility and marginalization [1, 2, 3, 4, 30].

Some examples of lack of representation faced by the community include:

**Lack of representation in media:** LGBTQA+ individuals are often underrepresented or misrepresented in mainstream media, leading to stereotypes and a lack of understanding about their experiences.

**Lack of representation in politics:** LGBTQA+ individuals are often underrepresented in political leadership positions, making it difficult to advocate for policies promoting equality and inclusion.

**Lack of representation in education:** LGBTQA+ history and experiences are often not included in mainstream education curricula, leading to a lack of understanding and acceptance of diverse identities and experiences [10, 30].

**Lack of representation in the workplace:** LGBTQA+ individuals may not see themselves represented in leadership positions or their workplaces, which can lead to isolation and lack of support.

**Lack of representation in healthcare:** Healthcare providers may not have adequate training or understanding of LGBTQA+ health issues, which can lead to misdiagnosis or mistreatment. Lack of representation can significantly impact the mental health and well-being of LGBTQA+ individuals, as it can contribute to feelings of invisibility and marginalization. Individuals and organizations must promote the visibility and representation of diverse identities and experiences and advocate for policies and practices promoting equality and inclusion [12, 29].

**Conclusion:** Overall, social media has had a significant impact on the LGBTQA+ community. While it has provided a space for individuals to express their identities and connect with others, it has also exposed them to hate speech and discrimination. It is important that social media platforms continue to work towards creating a safe and supportive environment for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

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