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EXPLORING GENDERED LANGUAGE USEIN FILIPINOSOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE: IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNICATION AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Abstract:

This qualitative study examines gendered language use in Filipino social media discourse and its role in shaping communication and identity. Drawing on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis and gender performativity theory, 300 public posts and commentaries from Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok were analyzed. Results reveal distinct linguistic patterns: male users favored assertive speech, females used affiliative and empathetic tones, and LGBTQIA+ individuals employed creative vernaculars such as bekispeak *to assert identity and resist gender norms. Recurring themes included empowerment, body positivity, and resistance to stereotyping, mediated by Filipino cultural values such as* hiya *and* pakikisama*. The findings highlight the dual role of digital discourse in both reinforcing and challenging traditional gender roles. The study aligns with RA 9710 (Magna Carta of Women), RA 11313 (Safe Spaces Act), and CHED CMO No. 1, s. 2015, emphasizing the importance of inclusive, gender-sensitive language in educational and digital spaces. Implications point toward developing gender-fair communication strategies and culturally responsive curricula in higher education.*

Keywords: *gendered language, Filipino discourse, social media, identity construction, digital communication, gender equity, inclusive language*

Introduction

The advent of social media has transformed the landscape of linguistic interaction, offering dynamic platforms where language becomes a tool for both self-expression and sociocultural negotiation. In multilingual and multicultural contexts such as the Philippines, gendered language use in digital discourse warrants critical attention, particularly in the ways it reflects and constructs identities shaped by local values and global influences. Scholars have emphasized that language is not merely a neutral medium of communication but a site of power struggle and identity construction (Fairclough, 1995; Butler, 1990). Gendered discourse, as it unfolds in social media platforms, becomes a fertile ground for understanding how communicative practices reinforce, resist, or reconfigure traditional gender norms.

Anchored in Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (cited by Azmi, et.al., 2013) and Butler's theory of gender performativity (cited by Kakoliris, 2025), this study interrogates the linguistic patterns employed by Filipino users on Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok. These platforms represent digital public spheres where communicative agency is exercised and identities are negotiated in real time. Previous research has highlighted how gendered discourse in online settings is shaped by complex intersections of culture, identity, and social expectations (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Herring, 2008). In the Philippine setting, values such as *hiya* (shame) and *pakikisama* (social harmony) intricately mediate the ways users express gendered stances, particularly within the socio-semiotic spaces of digital platforms.

This inquiry, situated within a Southeast Asian linguistic ecology, contributes to the expanding literature on gender, language, and media by analyzing 300 publicly accessible posts and commentaries from selected social media platforms during Academic Year 2024–2025. It

reveals that male users predominantly utilize assertive and declarative speech acts; female users tend to adopt affiliative, empathetic, and relational discourse; while LGBTQIA+ individuals strategically deploy creative vernaculars such as *bekispeak*—a queer-coded linguistic register— to assert visibility and resist normative ideologies. Themes of empowerment, body positivity, and counter-stereotyping emerge as salient communicative acts that both uphold and challenge dominant gender discourses.

Crucially, this study aligns with the national legal frameworks that advocate for gender equity and safe communication spaces, notably RA 9710 (Magna Carta of Women) and RA 11313 (Safe Spaces Act), as well as CHED Memorandum Order No. 1, s. 2015, which promotes gender-sensitive education. As such, the research foregrounds the critical importance of gender-inclusive discourse in educational, digital, and policy-making contexts. The findings underscore the imperative for higher education institutions to integrate gender-fair language policies and culturally responsive pedagogies in developing empowered, critically literate communicators.

Objectives of the Study

This study, titled *"Exploring Gendered Language Use in Filipino Social Media Discourse: Implications for Communication and Identity Construction"*, conducted at Jose Rizal Memorial State University, Main Campus, Dapitan City during Academic Year 2024–2025, aims to:

1. Examine the linguistic features and discourse patterns used by Filipino social media users that reflect gender identities, roles, and power relations in digital interactions.
2. Identify recurring themes, lexical choices, and speech acts that contribute to the construction, negotiation, or subversion of gendered identities in online platforms.
3. Analyze how gendered language in social media contributes to shaping perceptions of communication and identity, particularly within the context of Filipino cultural and sociolinguistic norms.
4. Assess the implications of gendered discourse on inclusivity, equality, and representation in alignment with the principles of Republic Act No. 9710 (Magna Carta of Women), emphasizing the elimination of gender-based stereotyping and discrimination in communication.
5. Contribute to policy-driven academic discourse that supports the implementation of CHED Memorandum Order No. 1, s. 2015 on Gender and Development (GAD), by promoting research that strengthens gender sensitivity and equality in digital and educational spaces.
6. Support the objectives of Republic Act No. 7722 (Higher Education Act of 1994) by generating research-based insights that can inform culturally responsive curricula, gender-inclusive communication strategies, and identity-affirming practices in Philippine higher education.

Methodology

In conducting the study titled *"Exploring Gendered Language Use in Filipino Social Media Discourse: Implications for Communication and Identity Construction"* at Jose Rizal Memorial State University, Main Campus, Dapitan City during Academic Year 2024–2025, the researchers employed a qualitative discourse analysis approach grounded in Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Data were drawn from purposively selected public posts, captions, and comment threads from Filipino social media users across

platforms such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter), ensuring representation of various gender identities. Thematic and linguistic patterns were analyzed to uncover how language use constructs, reinforces, or challenges gender norms in digital spaces. The methodology aligns with CHED Memorandum Order No. 1, series of 2015, on Gender and Development (GAD), which mandates the integration of gender sensitivity and gender-based analysis in higher education research. Additionally, it supports Republic Act No. 9710 (Magna Carta of Women), by promoting inclusive language inquiry and gender equity in media discourse, and Republic Act No. 7722 (Higher Education Act of 1994), which empowers HEIs to undertake socially relevant and policy-driven research that enhances national development and cultural awareness.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative, interpretive research design anchored in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and informed by the post-structuralist theory of gender performativity. The approach is premised on the view that language is a socially situated practice through which identities, ideologies, and power relations are enacted (Fairclough as cited by Azmi, et.al., 2013). Given the exploratory nature of the inquiry, the study adopted a multimodal discourse analytical framework to examine the linguistic and sociocultural dimensions of gendered language use in Filipino social media discourse.

Data Corpus and Sampling

The data corpus comprised 300 publicly accessible posts and commentaries sourced from three major social media platforms—Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok—between January and April 2025. A purposive sampling technique was used to select texts that explicitly or implicitly engaged with issues of gender, identity, and sociocultural values. The criteria for inclusion were: (1) texts authored by self-identified Filipino users, (2) content involving themes related to gender expression, representation, empowerment, discrimination, or resistance, and (3) availability of linguistic features that reflect diverse gender performances (e.g., use of bekispeak, gendered pronouns, hashtags, speech acts).

The data were purposively sampled from users who self-identified as Filipino and ranged in age from **18 to 35**, reflecting the demographic most active and discursively visible in Philippine digital culture (We Are Social, 2024).

Each data unit was selected based on relevance to **gender expression, identity discourse, or interactional gendered language patterns**, with particular attention given to:

- The presence of **gendered lexical items** (e.g., pronouns, gendered honorifics, and local queer lexicon),
- The use of **code-switching** between Filipino, English, and regional languages (especially Bisaya),
- The deployment of language to **affirm, parody, or resist** gender norms.

Data Analysis Procedure

Following Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA—textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice (cited by Azmi, Samsuddin, & Rahman, 2013)—each post or commentary was analyzed for micro-level linguistic patterns (lexical choices, modality, speech acts), meso-level discursive strategies (identity positioning, intertextuality, narrative frames), and macro-level ideological implications (reproduction or disruption of gender norms). Coding was performed using NVivo software to categorize emerging themes and recurring linguistic features.

137 Special attention was given to markers of assertiveness, empathy, affiliation, creativity, and
138 resistance, particularly in relation to users' perceived gender identities.

139 To further substantiate the interpretive findings, Butler's theory of gender performativity
140 (as cited by Kakoliris, 2025) was employed to trace how language functions as an act of doing—
141 performing gender identities rather than simply describing them. This facilitated a nuanced
142 understanding of how linguistic practices serve as modes of negotiating power, visibility, and
143 inclusion in a digital environment governed by both global and local cultural scripts.

Ethical Considerations and Legal Relevance

145 The study adhered to ethical research standards in digital ethnography. Only publicly
146 available posts were included to respect user privacy, and any identifying markers (e.g.,
147 usernames, profile images, direct references) were anonymized during data analysis and
148 presentation. Informed by the guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR,
149 2020), the study maintained transparency, confidentiality, and respect for digital authorship and
150 consent in online spaces.
151 Ethical considerations were observed by ensuring all selected data were from **publicly**
152 **accessible content**, and not personally identifiable information was disclosed. In line with
153 ethical discourse research guidelines and university clearance protocols, the study adhered to
154 **data privacy** and **informed consent** principles as applicable in public discourse research.
155 This qualitative design, grounded in CDA and supported by a robust and ethically curated
156 dataset, allows for a critical exploration of how Filipino social media users deploy language in
157 ways that reflect broader ideological struggles over gender, identity, and power in the digital age.
158

Theoretical and Legal Integration

160 Methodologically, the study's analytic lens was aligned not only with academic
161 theoretical frameworks but also with national legal mandates. The analysis explicitly considered
162 discursive implications within the scope of Republic Act No. 9710 (Magna Carta of Women),
163 Republic Act No. 11313 (Safe Spaces Act), and CHED Memorandum Order No. 1, s. 2015 on
164 Gender and Development (GAD). These frameworks served as evaluative reference points to
165 assess how gendered language use either perpetuates or challenges communication practices that
166 uphold inclusivity, equality, and identity affirmation.
167

Research Setting

169 This study was conducted under the academic auspices of **Jose Rizal Memorial State**
170 **University (JRMSU) – Main Campus**, located in **Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte**, a state
171 higher education institution in the southern Philippines that serves as a critical hub for
172 multidisciplinary research in the humanities and social sciences. The university's commitment to
173 inclusive, socially responsive scholarship is reflected in its Gender and Development (GAD)
174 programs and its alignment with national mandates such as **Republic Act No. 9710 (Magna**
175 **Carta of Women)** and **RA No. 11313 (Safe Spaces Act)**, which promote gender equality,
176 respect for diversity, and ethical digital citizenship.
177 The research setting extends beyond the physical confines of the university to encompass
178 **virtual social media environments**, particularly the public domains of three dominant
179 platforms: **Facebook**, **Twitter (X)**, and **TikTok**. These platforms were chosen based on their
180 widespread usage among Filipinos and their role in shaping contemporary discourse, particularly

181 in relation to youth culture, gender identities, and digital self-presentation. According to **We Are**
182 **Social (2024)**, over **86 million Filipinos** actively use social media, with individuals aged **18 to**
183 **35** comprising the largest and most engaged demographic—a group recognized for its discursive
184 productivity, political participation, and identity performance in digital spaces.
185
186 **Participants and Corpus Selection**
187   The study focused on **Filipino social media users aged 18–35**, consistent with national
188 digital literacy data and sociolinguistic literature that identifies this cohort as highly active in
189 online interaction and content creation (David & Atienza, 2021). Participants were not engaged
190 directly; instead, a **non-reactive, unobtrusive sampling technique** was employed wherein
191 **publicly available posts, comments, and captions** were curated as units of analysis. This
192 method was chosen to ensure ecological validity and avoid influencing user behavior, while
193 maintaining compliance with ethical research standards in discourse analysis (Bucholtz, 2007).
194   A total of **300 data units** were purposively selected based on relevance to gendered language
195 use, including:
196 • Posts or threads that exhibit gender-relevant linguistic features (e.g., pronouns, queer
197   lexicon, honorifics);
198 • Discussions involving gender identity, gender politics, or sexuality;
199 • Expressions that encode, resist, or parody gender norms;
200 • Code-switched texts reflecting Filipino, English, and regional language usage.
201   Content was gathered from **January to April 2025**, aligning with peak periods of
202 national discourse related to gender issues (e.g., Women's Month, Pride campaigns). Each data
203 sample was screened for public visibility, contextual clarity, and linguistic richness. No personal
204 identifiers (names, images, usernames) were collected or reported.
205
206 **Data Collection**
207   This study utilized a **purposive sampling technique** to collect a linguistically and
208 contextually rich corpus of gendered discourse from popular social media platforms widely used
209 by Filipinos. A total of **300 social media texts**—comprising original posts, captions, and
210 comment threads—were gathered from **Facebook, Twitter (X), and TikTok**, selected for their
211 discursive breadth, multimodal nature, and high engagement rates among young Filipino users.
212   Data collection was carried out between **January and April 2025**, a period strategically
213 chosen to coincide with heightened digital activity related to **National Women's Month**
214 **(March)** and social movements such as LGBTQ+ Pride campaigns and gender advocacy events,
215 which typically generated public discourse around gender identity, sexuality, and inclusivity.
216   To ensure the **credibility and validity** of the dataset, posts were included based on the
217 following criteria:
218 • Content was **publicly visible** and accessible without login or private group membership;
219 • Posts reflected **gendered linguistic practices**, including but not limited to: pronoun
220   usage, gendered terms and markers, queer lexicon (e.g., "beki" language), and references
221   to femininity, masculinity, and non-binary identities;
222 • Language strategies included **code-switching**, stance-taking, parody, or resistance toward
223   traditional gender roles;
224 • Posts were authored by Filipino users aged **18–35**, representing the demographic most
225   active in digital communication (We Are Social, 2024).

226   The posts were retrieved through manual observation and keyword-driven searches, with
227 attention to **linguistic salience** and **interactional depth**. No contact was made with users, and no
228 comments were manipulated or provoked, adhering to **non-reactive and unobtrusive data**
229 **collection protocols** consistent with qualitative discourse research standards (Bucholtz, 2007;
230 Townsend & Wallace, 2016).
231   All data were **anonymized** to protect user identity. Usernames, profile pictures,
232 timestamps, locations, and other identifiable details were either omitted or replaced with
233 generalized descriptions (e.g., "User A," "Commenter X"). Data storage and handling followed
234 the university'sGuidelines on Human Research, and the study received prior clearance from the
235 College of Arts and Sciences as per requirements for accreditation and other assessments from
236 accrediting bodies.
237   This method of data collection is not only academically sound but also legally grounded.
238 In alignment with **Republic Act No. 9710 (Magna Carta of Women)**, the study supports efforts
239 to dismantle gender stereotypes in media and language. Similarly, **Republic Act No. 11313**
240 **(Safe Spaces Act)** reinforces the relevance of examining online discourse, especially in light of
241 the increasing prevalence of gender-based harassment in digital platforms. Furthermore, **DepEd**
242 **Order No. 32, s. 2017** advocates for gender-responsive and inclusive language in all
243 communicative contexts, including online education and discourse.
244   Thus, the selection, scope, and management of data in this study not only fulfill the
245 standards of **ethical discourse analysis** but also exemplify compliance with **Philippine legal**
246 **frameworks** that promote gender equality and digital responsibility.
247
248 **Data Analysis**
249   The data in this study were analyzed through a **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)** lens
250 using **Norman Fairclough'sthree-dimensional framework** (cited by **Hassan, Rehman,**
251 **Zafar,Akbar, & Masood,**2019), which examines discourse across three interrelated levels:
252   1. **Textual analysis** (the formal linguistic features of the texts),
253   2. **Discourse practice** (production, distribution, and consumption of texts), and
254   3. **Sociocultural practice** (the broader ideological and institutional structures in which
255   discourse is embedded).
256   This analytical framework enabled a **multilayered interpretation** of gendered language
257 in Filipino social media posts by integrating both **linguistic form and sociopolitical context**,
258 particularly within the legal and cultural landscape of the Philippines.
259

Step 1: Textual Analysis
261   At the textual level, each of the 300 data units—comprising public posts and comment
262 threads—was examined for **gendered linguistic features**, including:
263   • Pronoun usage and shifts in referential identity (e.g., use of *sila* as a singular inclusive
264   pronoun),
265   • Lexical choices that reflect gendered ideologies or queer subcultural expressions (e.g.,
266   *beki speak*, feminized/machoized terms),
267   • Tone and modality (assertiveness, hedging, irony, humor),
268   • Emoticons, hashtags, and emojis as semiotic extensions of gendered expression,
269   • Patterns of **code-switching** (primarily Filipino-English, and occasionally regional
270   languages such as Bisaya) as identity-marking strategies.
271

Step 2: Discourse Practice Analysis

The analysis then shifted to the **production and circulation** of the texts. This included investigating:

- How social media users adopt gendered discourse conventions (e.g., "call-out culture," performative hashtags),
- Interactional patterns between users (e.g., alignment vs. contestation of gendered statements),
- Recurring communicative strategies used to **affirm, parody, resist, or negotiate** gender norms online.

This stage incorporated a discourse-ethnographic orientation to understand how posts were received, liked, shared, or commented on—providing insight into the **interpretive repertoires** of Filipino netizens engaging with gendered discourse.

Step 3: Sociocultural Practice Analysis

The third stage contextualized findings within **Philippine sociopolitical and legal frameworks**, as well as institutional practices. The analysis was informed by:

- **Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity**, which views gender not as a static trait but as a discursively constructed and reiterated identity,
- Legal frameworks such as:
    - **Republic Act No. 9710 (Magna Carta of Women)**, which mandates the elimination of gender bias in media and communication,
    - **Republic Act No. 11313 (Safe Spaces Act)**, which addresses the prevention of online gender-based sexual harassment,
    - **DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017**, which promotes gender-responsive and inclusive language education,
- JRMSU's institutional thrust toward **gender equality, inclusive digital citizenship, and ethical communication practices**, as mandated by its College of Arts and Sciences and Gender and Development (GAD) initiatives.

Coding Procedure and Thematic Analysis

The entire dataset was **coded inductively and deductively**, using a thematic analysis protocol supported by **NVivo software** to ensure consistency and traceability of categories. Initial codes were drawn from existing literature on gender and discourse, while emergent codes were developed through close textual engagement with the data.

The core themes that emerged include:

- **Reinforcement vs. Subversion of Traditional Gender Norms**
- **Digital Gender Identity Performance**
- **Linguistic Resistance through Queer Vernacular**
- **Inclusive and Non-Binary Language Innovations**
- **Gendered Hostility and Verbal Harassment Patterns**

The coding process underwent **peer validation** through collaborative coding sessions with two discourse analysts from the College of Arts and Sciences, ensuring **inter-coder reliability** and **methodological transparency**.

This analytical process enabled a **critical interpretation of language as a social practice**, and highlighted how Filipino social media users—consciously or not—participate in the construction of gendered subjectivities. It also illuminated the urgent need for **gender-**

317 **inclusive communication training, policy implementation, and pedagogical integration** in
318 both academic and online spaces, as required by **Philippine laws** and university mandates.
319

320 **Results**

321   Based on the objectives of the study, the results were as follows:

322 1. **On examining the linguistic features and discourse patterns used by Filipino social**
323   **media users that reflect gender identities, roles, and power relations in digital**
324   **interactions:**
325   The study revealed distinct gendered linguistic patterns, with male users tending
326   to use assertive, directive, and sometimes confrontational language, while female users
327   predominantly employed affective, empathetic, and affiliative expressions. LGBTQIA+
328   users, particularly self-identified gay individuals, exhibited playful code-switching and
329   stylized vernaculars (e.g., *bekispeak*), which both asserted identity and resisted traditional
330   gender binaries. Power relations were evident in language choices—particularly in how
331   gender roles were reinforced or challenged through forms of address, pronoun usage, and
332   tagging behavior. These patterns align with the sociolinguistic principle that language
333   serves both to reflect and shape societal norms.

334 2. **On identifying recurring themes, lexical choices, and speech acts that contribute to**
335   **the construction, negotiation, or subversion of gendered identities in online**
336   **platforms:**
337   Themes such as "empowerment," "body positivity," "masculine dominance,"
338   "femininity and morality," and "coming out narratives" emerged prominently. Lexical
339   choices included reappropriated gendered slurs (e.g., *babae lang ako pero…*, *baklang*
340   *matapang*) and solidarity markers (e.g., *sis*, *mars*, *lods*) that fostered community within
341   marginalized gender groups. Speech acts ranged from performative declarations of
342   identity to illocutionary acts of resistance against gender stereotyping. These findings
343   affirm that digital discourse is not merely expressive but also performative and
344   ideological—actively reshaping gendered subjectivities in the Philippine social media
345   landscape.

346 3. **On analyzing how gendered language in social media contributes to shaping**
347   **perceptions of communication and identity, particularly within Filipino cultural and**
348   **sociolinguistic norms:**
349   The study found that Filipino cultural values such as *hiya* (shame), *pakikisama*
350   (social harmony), and *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) subtly influenced the way users
351   performed and moderated their gendered communication. For example, assertive female
352   users often mitigated their statements with politeness markers (*po*, *opo*) or emojis to
353   soften perceived aggressiveness. In contrast, expressions of masculinity were frequently
354   validated through humor and banter. The negotiation of identity in digital discourse was
355   highly context-dependent, shaped by both platform affordances (e.g., hashtags, comment
356   visibility) and prevailing sociocultural expectations.

357 4. **On assessing the implications of gendered discourse on inclusivity, equality, and**
358   **representation in alignment with RA 9710 (Magna Carta of Women):**
359   The findings suggest that while social media provides spaces for gender
360   expression and empowerment, it also reproduces structural inequalities through language.
361   Stereotypes about women as emotionally fragile or men as inherently dominant persist in
362   commentaries, memes, and viral content. However, counter-narratives—such as feminist

discourse and queer linguistic creativity—are growing in visibility and influence. These patterns highlight the dual role of digital discourse in both perpetuating and challenging gender-based discrimination, aligning with the Magna Carta of Women's mandate to eliminate gender-based stereotyping and promote equitable representation.

5. **On contributing to policy-driven academic discourse that supports CHED Memorandum Order No. 1, s. 2015 (Gender and Development):**

The research contributes to GAD implementation by providing empirical linguistic data that can be used in designing gender-fair language policies, inclusive communication modules, and awareness campaigns in HEIs. The study's findings support CHED's call for research that exposes structural and symbolic forms of gender inequality, and for integrating gender sensitivity across disciplines. It also demonstrates how social media discourse can be harnessed as a pedagogical tool to cultivate critical language awareness and digital citizenship among Filipino students.

6. **On supporting RA 7722 (Higher Education Act of 1994) through research-based insights that inform culturally responsive curricula and gender-inclusive practices:**

The study underscores the importance of including discourse analysis, gender studies, and digital sociolinguistics in tertiary curricula. It offers actionable recommendations for HEIs—such as embedding gender-fair language training in communication courses, and facilitating workshops on social media literacy with a focus on identity and representation. Through this, the research fulfills RA 7722's directive to produce transformative, contextually grounded scholarship that contributes to national development, cultural affirmation, and educational equity.

Linguistic Markers of Gender in Filipino Social Discourse

The analysis of 300 purposively sampled social media texts revealed distinct **linguistic markers associated with gendered identity construction**, reflecting recurring discursive patterns aligned with **traditional gender norms**, as well as **emerging inclusive practices**. These markers emerged through **textual and interactional analysis** across platforms (Facebook, Twitter/X, and TikTok) and varied depending on the user's **gender expression**, **platform conventions**, and **discursive goals**.

Masculine-Indexed Discourse Patterns

Posts and comments that aligned with masculine identities or expressions often displayed the following linguistic traits:

- **Assertive tone and directness** in speech acts, often used in arguments, criticisms, or declarations (e.g., "Walang arte, trabaho lang!" [No fuss, just work!]).
- Frequent use of **humorous banter**, sarcasm, or teasing as a form of social bonding, particularly among male users.
- Incorporation of **profanity or vulgar slang** (e.g., *gago*, *bwisit*, *tarantado*) as both expressive intensifiers and markers of informal male camaraderie.
- Deployment of language that emphasized **stoicism, dominance, or resilience**, often tied to stereotypical representations of masculinity (e.g., "Lalake ako, hindi ako iiyak" [I'm a man, I don't cry]).

These patterns reflect **discursive reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity**, consistent with sociolinguistic research on Filipino male communication styles (Garcia, 2008). In light of

408   **RA No. 11313 (Safe Spaces Act)**, such patterns also surface ethical concerns when profanity is
409   weaponized in gendered harassment.
410

411   **Feminine-Indexed Discourse Patterns**
412   Feminine-aligned language use exhibited a contrasting set of features, typically characterized by:

413   • **Affiliative and emotional tone**, with heightened use of **empathy markers** and
414   **solidarity expressions** (e.g., "Stay strong sis!" or "Kaya mo yan, love!").
415   • Frequent use of **emojis** (e.g., ♡□, 🫂, 🎀), **visual symbols**, and **hashtags** that
416   emphasized emotional stance-taking and relational closeness.
417   • Use of **hedging devices** such as "I think," "maybe," or "just," signaling politeness, non-
418   imposition, or **discursive tentativeness**—a common linguistic pattern in traditionally
419   feminized communication (Tannen, 1990).
420   • Preference for **inclusive and supportive language**, including expressions of affirmation,
421   reassurance, and shared vulnerability.
422   These patterns align with **gendered discourse traditions in Filipino digital culture**, and
423   echo educational calls for **gender-fair, empathetic communication** under **DepEd Order No.
424   32, s. 2017**.
425

426   **Emerging Non-Binary and Inclusive Markers**
427   In addition to traditional binary distinctions, a notable cluster of posts reflected **inclusive
428   or non-binary language practices**, such as:

429   • Use of **gender-neutral pronouns** (e.g., *sila*, *Mx.*, *mga friends*) or deliberate avoidance of
430   gendered terms.
431   • Adoption of **queer vernacular and reappropriated slang**, including
432   **Bekinese/"Swardspeak"** forms (e.g., "char," "push," "pak ganern") that both parody and
433   celebrate fluid gender identities.
434   • Language play that challenged heteronormativity and traditional gender roles (e.g., "Ang
435   tunay na lalaki, marunong umiyak at magmahal." [A real man knows how to cry and
436   love.]).
437   Such expressions reflect **linguistic agency and performativity**, as theorized by **Butler
438   (1990)**, where users actively construct and negotiate identities that subvert binary expectations.
439   These innovations contribute to the **pluralization of gender discourse** in the Philippine digital
440   sphere.
441

442   **Code-Switching as a Gendered Discursive Strategy**
443   The study found **frequent and purposeful code-switching** between **Filipino, English**,
444   and regional languages—most notably **Bisaya**—across the 300 publicly accessible posts and
445   comment threads. This practice was not simply a reflection of linguistic convenience but
446   functioned as a **sociolinguistic resource** that users drew upon to:

447   • **Express nuanced emotional or cultural meanings**, often untranslatable in a single
448   language (e.g., "Grabe siya, pero I get where she's coming from. Maka-relate jud ko."),
449   • **Mark solidarity and shared regional or gender identities**, especially in posts from
450   Mindanao-based users, where Bisaya terms were used to evoke **cultural rootedness**
451   while also addressing gender topics,

- **Perform identity shifts**, in which English was often associated with liberal, progressive stances (e.g., "I support their choice. Gender is not a binary."), and Filipino/Bisaya used for familiar, intimate tones,
- Enhance **stylistic effect**, especially when humor, sarcasm, or affection was layered onto expressions of gendered opinion or advocacy.

This finding supports previous work on code-switching as an identity performance tool (Bautista, 2004; Thompson, 2003), and situates it within **Butler's** notion of **gender performativity**(cited by He, 2017), wherein language is both constitutive and performative of identity. Code-switching, in this view, enables users to traverse cultural and linguistic borders, while simultaneously constructing gendered positions that are **fluid, contextual, and strategic**.

Inclusive Pronoun Usage and the Disruption of Gender Binaries

The study also identified a **growing linguistic trend toward inclusivity and non-binary reference**, particularly through the **intentional use of gender-neutral or inclusive pronouns**. One of the most significant findings was the use of **"sila"** as a **singular pronoun** to refer to individuals whose gender was either non-disclosed, fluid, or intentionally unspecified. Examples include:

- "Sila ang best friend ko—hindi niya kailangang i-label sarili niya for me to respect them."
- "I love sila so much. Walang label, just love."

In addition to pronoun shifts, users increasingly employed **neutral relational terms** such as **"partner," "significant other," "jowa,"** and even the English **"they"** in lieu of traditionally gendered designations like "boyfriend" or "girlfriend." These shifts signal an **emerging digital lexicon of inclusivity**, particularly among youth and LGBTQ+ communities.

The inclusive linguistic practices observed here exemplify **resistance to normative gender binaries** embedded in both English and Filipino, where historically gendered terms (e.g., *siya, lalaki, babae*) dominate. This discursive shift is aligned with global movements toward linguistic justice and mirrors the localized effort to **recognize and affirm non-binary and fluid identities** within the Philippine context.

Reproduction of Gender Norms Through Stereotypical Associations

Conversely, a notable subset of social media discourse—especially from users who did not explicitly engage with gender discourse—**reproduced traditional stereotypes**, often unconsciously. These included:

- Equating **emotional expressiveness** or vulnerability with **femininity**, while describing rationality, restraint, or stoicism as **masculine virtues** (e.g., "Girls talaga, iyakin lagi. Boys don't show weakness."),
- Valorizing **male leadership** and associating authority with masculine-coded traits, especially in posts about political, educational, or familial roles (e.g., "Hanap ako ng lalaking lider, 'yung matapang at may panindigan."),
- Minimizing or infantilizing feminine traits in humor, often reinforcing tropes of **over-sensitivity**, **gossip**, or **emotional instability**.

These discursive choices mirror **persistent sociolinguistic hierarchies**, where **gender becomes a framework for moral and intellectual valuation**. Although often unintentional, such posts sustain what the **Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710)** seeks to dismantle—namely, the **linguistic perpetuation of gender-based inequality** in public and private spheres.

498   The dual presence of **subversive and reproductive discourse** within the same
499   communicative space underscores the **tension between progressive and patriarchal values** in
500   Philippine digital culture. While some users contribute to **linguistic liberation**, others
501   unintentionally **reinscribe dominant ideologies**, highlighting the need for **critical language**
502   **awareness and intervention**.
503
504   **Discussion**
505   The results of this study strongly affirm the position that **Filipino social media spaces**
506   **serve as dynamic, contested sites for the construction, negotiation, and performance of**
507   **gendered identities**. Drawing on a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of 300 purposively sampled
508   social media texts, the study provides empirical evidence that language use on platforms such as
509   Facebook, Twitter (X), and TikTok reflects both the **entrenchment of traditional gender**
510   **norms** and the **emergence of counter-discourses that subvert these norms**. These linguistic
511   behaviors are not isolated communicative acts but rather **constitutive elements of gender**
512   **identity performance** and **sociopolitical positioning**, particularly for users navigating the
513   complexities of contemporary Filipino gender ideologies.
514
515   **Language as a Site of Gendered Identity Construction**
516   Consistent with **Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity**(as cited by Kakoliris,
517   2025), the findings illustrate how Filipino netizens—particularly youth and LGBTQ+
518   communities—use language to **perform, affirm, and reconfigure gendered selves**. For
519   instance, the recurrent use of **code-switching**, especially between English, Filipino, and Bisaya,
520   reveals the **strategic linguistic hybridity** that enables users to traverse cultural boundaries and
521   express nuanced gender positions. Code-switching in this context does not merely serve
522   pragmatic communicative functions; it also **indexes shifting gender ideologies**, such as when
523   users use English to signal progressive stances on non-binary identity or Filipino to express
524   affective solidarity.
525   Similarly, the **intentional use of inclusive pronouns** (e.g., "sila" as a singular referent)
526   and gender-neutral terms (e.g., "partner" instead of "girlfriend/boyfriend") marks a significant
527   linguistic evolution toward **gender sensitivity and inclusivity** in online interaction. These forms
528   actively **resist the grammatical and sociocultural constraints of gender binaries** inherent in
529   both Filipino and English. They also illustrate how online users participate in the **linguistic**
530   **innovation required to represent emerging gender identities**, especially those that fall outside
531   of cisnormative and heteronormative frameworks.
532
533   **Subversion and Reproduction of Gender Norms**
534   The discursive landscape revealed a **duality of gendered expression**: while many users
535   consciously subvert normative ideologies through humor, satire, or reclaimed language (e.g.,
536   swardspeak or "beki speak"), a substantial number still **unconsciously reproduce gender**
537   **stereotypes**. This includes language that associates emotionality with femininity, authority with
538   masculinity, and vulnerability with weakness—reflecting the enduring **cultural residues of**
539   **patriarchal norms** in Filipino communication.
540   The presence of such binary discourses, even in digital spaces presumed to be
541   democratizing, demonstrates how **digital platforms are not inherently progressive** but rather
542   mirror the **ideological tensions** of broader Filipino society. **Fairclough's** three-dimensional
543   model (as cited by Azmi, et. al., 2013) helps contextualize these findings, as they reflect both

textual features and the sociocultural practices that shape and are shaped by them. The **intertextuality** of memes, hashtags, and gendered commentary—some celebratory, some marginalizing—reinforces the idea that **language is both a tool and a terrain for ideological struggle**.

Legal and Policy Implications: Operationalizing Gender-Fair Discourse

This study underscores the **urgent need to align digital communication practices with existing legal and educational mandates in the Philippines**, notably:

- **Republic Act No. 9710 (Magna Carta of Women)**, which explicitly calls for the elimination of gender stereotyping and discriminatory language in media and public discourse;
- **Republic Act No. 11313 (Safe Spaces Act)**, which penalizes gender-based online harassment and promotes respectful digital engagement;
- **DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017**, which institutionalizes **gender-responsive language use in educational systems**, including the development of learning materials that are free from bias and uphold the principles of equality and respect.
- **CHED Memorandum Order No. 01, s. 2015,** which establishes policies and guidelines on **Gender and Development (GAD)** in CHED and higher education institutions, and mandates HEIs to integrate gender mainstreaming into all institutional functions of SUCs.

The findings from this study reinforce the **necessity of operationalizing these legal provisions**, particularly in higher education institutions such as JRMSU, where communication and discourse courses can serve as foundational spaces for instilling **gender-fair and inclusive linguistic practices**. Despite the presence of such mandates, the data suggest that gender-fair language is still not consistently modeled or reinforced in online environments—highlighting a critical **gap between policy and practice**.

Conclusion

This research underscores the evolving, performative, and contested nature of gendered language in Filipino social media discourse. Drawing from a corpus of naturally occurring data across various platforms, the findings reveal that digital interactions are not merely reflections of offline gender norms but active sites for negotiating, reinforcing, or subverting them. The linguistic choices observed—ranging from lexical selection, pronoun use, to syntactic structures—demonstrate how Filipino netizens linguistically construct and reconstruct gender identities in ways that are both traditional and transgressive.

The study's discourse analysis reveals two major patterns: first, a persistence of gendered stereotypes perpetuated through humor, memes, and comment threads, often under the guise of "freedom of speech"; second, the presence of counter-discourses that challenge these stereotypes, often articulated by marginalized voices seeking visibility, recognition, and respect. These tensions highlight the dual function of social media as both a space for ideological reproduction and a platform for transformative gender advocacy.

Anchored in the broader socio-political context, this study responds to the imperatives of *Republic Act No. 9710* or the **Magna Carta of Women**, which mandates the elimination of gender-based discrimination, including in media and communication. Furthermore, it affirms the constitutional guarantee of *freedom of expression*, tempered by ethical obligations enshrined in *Republic Act No. 11313* or the **Safe Spaces Act**, which addresses gender-based online sexual

589   harassment. These legal frameworks amplify the urgency of critically engaging with how
590   language is used—and often misused—in online platforms.
591   Thus, this research validates the necessity of:
592   • **Institutionalizing gender-fair and inclusive language policies**, particularly in digital
593   communication, education, and media sectors;
594   • **Integrating inclusive communication training** in both formal and non-formal education
595   systems to foster respect for gender diversity;
596   • **Promoting critical digital literacy**, equipping users with the ability to analyze, evaluate,
597   and ethically participate in online discourse.
598   Finally, this study advances the national and global commitment to **gender equality,**
599   **responsible digital citizenship**, and **linguistic human rights**, as articulated not only in
600   Philippine legal instruments but also in international frameworks such as the **Convention on the**
601   **Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** and the **UNESCO**
602   **Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021)**, which recognizes the
603   centrality of inclusive language in shaping equitable digital futures.
604   This research contributes to both theoretical and applied linguistics by illuminating how
605   social media discourse reflects, resists, and reshapes gendered identities in the Philippines—
606   marking a critical intersection between language, power, and identity in the digital age.
607   Consequently, the study highlights the dynamic and performative nature of gendered
608   language use in Filipino social media discourse. As digital spaces become extensions of social
609   reality, language therein functions both as a mirror and a maker of identity. The analysis reveals
610   the dual nature of online discourse: as a site for both **stereotype reinforcement and resistance**.
611
612   **Pedagogical and Institutional Recommendations**
613   In light of the empirical insights, it is recommended that **gender-sensitive discourse**
614   **modules** be explicitly integrated into the communication, linguistics, and education curricula at
615   the tertiary level. These modules should:
616   • Include **critical discussions on pronoun use, code-switching, and gender ideologies** in
617   both Filipino and global contexts;
618   • Examine digital discourse as **a sociolinguistic and ideological field**, thereby training
619   students to identify and resist subtle forms of gender stereotyping;
620   • Promote **multilingual and multicultural sensitivity**, particularly recognizing how
621   regional languages like "Bisaya" intersect with gender performance and identity
622   expression.
623   **Faculty development programs** should be introduced to train educators in **inclusive**
624   **linguistic frameworks** that reflect both contemporary sociolinguistic realities and legal
625   imperatives. Educational institutions, as agents of social transformation, are tasked with
626   cultivating critical citizens who are not only proficient communicators but also **ethical language**
627   **users committed to social justice and equality**.
628   Consequently, the discursive practices observed on Filipino social media platforms
629   demonstrate that language is far more than a medium of expression—it is an **arena of gender**
630   **identity construction, negotiation, and contestation**. The findings of this research reveal a
631   landscape where users variously reinforce, reframe, or rupture gender norms through language,
632   contributing to a richer understanding of the evolving dynamics of Filipino identity in the digital
633   age.

634   By situating these practices within a legal-educational framework, this study makes a
635 case for the **institutionalization of gender-fair communication in both policy and pedagogy**,
636 ensuring that platforms like social media do not merely reflect but actively shape a more
637 inclusive and equitable Philippine society.
638
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