



RESEARCH ARTICLE

EXPLORING GENDERED LANGUAGE USE IN FILIPINO SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE: IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNICATION AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

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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 towards developing gender-fair communication strategies and culturally responsive curricula in higher education.

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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.

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

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

Ethical Considerations and Legal Relevance:-

The study adhered to ethical research standards in digital ethnography. Only publicly available posts were included to respect user privacy, and any identifying markers (e.g., usernames, profile images, direct references) were anonymized during data analysis and presentation. Informed by the guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR, 2020), the study maintained transparency, confidentiality, and respect for digital authorship and consent in online spaces. Ethical considerations were observed by ensuring all selected data were from publicly accessible content, and not personally identifiable information was disclosed. In line with ethical discourse research guidelines and university clearance protocols, the study adhered to data privacy and informed consent principles as applicable in public discourse research.

This qualitative design, grounded in CDA and supported by a robust and ethically curated dataset, allows for a critical exploration of how Filipino social media users deploy language in ways that reflect broader ideological struggles over gender, identity, and power in the digital age.

Theoretical and Legal Integration:-

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

Research Setting:-

This study was conducted under the academic auspices of Jose Rizal Memorial State University (JRMSU) – Main Campus, located in Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte, a state higher education institution in the southern Philippines that serves as a critical hub for multidisciplinary research in the humanities and social sciences. The university's commitment to inclusive, socially responsive scholarship is reflected in its Gender and Development (GAD) programs and its alignment with national mandates such as Republic Act No. 9710 (Magna Carta of Women) and RA No. 11313 (Safe Spaces Act), which promote gender equality, respect for diversity, and ethical digital citizenship.

The research setting extends beyond the physical confines of the university to encompass virtual social media environments, particularly the public domains of three dominant platforms: Facebook, Twitter (X), and TikTok. These platforms were chosen based on their widespread usage among Filipinos and their role in shaping contemporary discourse, particularly in relation to youth culture, gender identities, and digital self-presentation. According to We Are Social (2024), over 86 million Filipinos actively use social media, with individuals aged **18 to 35** comprising the largest and most engaged demographic—a group recognized for its discursive productivity, political participation, and identity performance in digital spaces.

Participants and Corpus Selection:-

The study focused on **Filipino social media users aged 18–35**, consistent with national digital literacy data and sociolinguistic literature that identifies this cohort as highly active in online interaction and content creation (David & Atienza, 2021). Participants were not engaged directly; instead, a **non-reactive, unobtrusive sampling technique** was employed wherein **publicly available posts, comments, and captions** were curated as units of analysis. This method was chosen to ensure ecological validity and avoid influencing user behavior, while maintaining compliance with ethical research standards in discourse analysis (Bucholtz, 2007).

A total of 300 data units were purposively selected based on relevance to gendered language use, including:

- Posts or threads that exhibit gender-relevant linguistic features (e.g., pronouns, queer lexicon, honorifics);
- Discussions involving gender identity, gender politics, or sexuality;
- Expressions that encode, resist, or parody gender norms;
- Code-switched texts reflecting Filipino, English, and regional language usage.

Content was gathered from January to April 2025, aligning with peak periods of national discourse related to gender issues (e.g., Women's Month, Pride campaigns). Each data sample was screened for public visibility, contextual clarity, and linguistic richness. No personal identifiers (names, images, usernames) were collected or reported.

Data collection:-

This study utilized a purposive sampling technique to collect a linguistically and contextually rich corpus of gendered discourse from popular social media platforms widely used by Filipinos. A total of 300 social media texts—comprising original posts, captions, and comment threads—were gathered from Facebook, Twitter (X), and TikTok, selected for their discursive breadth, multimodal nature, and high engagement rates among young Filipino users.

Data collection was carried out between January and April 2025, a period strategically chosen to coincide with heightened digital activity related **to** National Women's Month (March) and social movements such as LGBTQ+

Pride campaigns and gender advocacy events, which typically generated public discourse around gender identity, sexuality, and inclusivity.

To ensure the credibility and validity of the dataset, posts were included based on the following criteria:

- Content was **publicly visible** and accessible without login or private group membership;
- Posts reflected **gendered linguistic practices**, including but not limited to: pronoun usage, gendered terms and markers, queer lexicon (e.g., “beki” language), and references to femininity, masculinity, and non-binary identities;
- Language strategies included **code-switching**, stance-taking, parody, or resistance toward traditional gender roles;
- Posts were authored by Filipino users aged **18–35**, representing the demographic most active in digital communication (We Are Social, 2024).

The posts were retrieved through manual observation and keyword-driven searches, with attention to linguistic salience and interactional depth. No contact was made with users, and no comments were manipulated or provoked, adhering to non-reactive and unobtrusive data collection protocols consistent with qualitative discourse research standards (Bucholtz, 2007; Townsend & Wallace, 2016).

All data were anonymized to protect user identity. Usernames, profile pictures, timestamps, locations, and other identifiable details were either omitted or replaced with generalized descriptions (e.g., “User A,” “Commenter X”). Data storage and handling followed the university’s Guidelines on Human Research, and the study received prior clearance from the College of Arts and Sciences as per requirements for accreditation and other assessments from accrediting bodies.

This method of data collection is not only academically sound but also legally grounded. In alignment with Republic Act No. 9710 (Magna Carta of Women), the study supports efforts to dismantle gender stereotypes in media and language. Similarly, Republic Act No. 11313 (Safe Spaces Act) reinforces the relevance of examining online discourse, especially in light of the increasing prevalence of gender-based harassment in digital platforms. Furthermore, DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017 advocates for gender-responsive and inclusive language in all communicative contexts, including online education and discourse.

Thus, the selection, scope, and management of data in this study not only fulfill the standards of ethical discourse analysis but also exemplify compliance with Philippine legal frameworks that promote gender equality and digital responsibility.

Data analysis:-

The data in this study were analyzed through a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) lens using Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework (cited by Hassan, Rehman, Zafar, Akbar, & Masood, 2019), which examines discourse across three interrelated levels:

1. **Textual analysis** (the formal linguistic features of the texts),
2. **Discourse practice** (production, distribution, and consumption of texts), and
3. **Sociocultural practice** (the broader ideological and institutional structures in which discourse is embedded).

This analytical framework enabled a multilayered interpretation of gendered language in Filipino social media posts by integrating both linguistic form and sociopolitical context, particularly within the legal and cultural landscape of the Philippines.

Textual Analysis:-

At the textual level, each of the 300 data units—comprising public posts and comment threads—was examined for gendered linguistic features, including:

- Pronoun usage and shifts in referential identity (e.g., use of *silá* as a singular inclusive pronoun),
- Lexical choices that reflect gendered ideologies or queer subcultural expressions (e.g., *beki* speak, feminized/machoized terms),
- Tone and modality (assertiveness, hedging, irony, humor),
- Emoticons, hashtags, and emojis as semiotic extensions of gendered expression,

- Patterns of **code-switching** (primarily Filipino-English, and occasionally regional languages such as Bisaya) as identity-marking strategies.

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.

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

Results:-

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

1. On examining the linguistic features and discourse patterns used by Filipino social media users that reflect gender identities, roles, and power relations in digital interactions: The study revealed distinct gendered linguistic patterns, with male users tending to use assertive, directive, and sometimes confrontational language, while female users predominantly employed affective, empathetic, and affiliative expressions. LGBTQIA+ users, particularly self-identified gay individuals, exhibited playful code-switching and stylized vernaculars (e.g., bekispeak), which both asserted identity and resisted traditional gender binaries. Power relations were

evident in language choices—particularly in how gender roles were reinforced or challenged through forms of address, pronoun usage, and tagging behavior. These patterns align with the sociolinguistic principle that language serves both to reflect and shape societal norms.

2. On identifying recurring themes, lexical choices, and speech acts that contribute to the construction, negotiation, or subversion of gendered identities in online platforms: Themes such as “empowerment,” “body positivity,” “masculine dominance,” “femininity and morality,” and “coming out narratives” emerged prominently. Lexical choices included reappropriated gendered slurs (e.g., *babae lang ako pero...*, *baklang matapang*) and solidarity markers (e.g., *sis*, *mars*, *lods*) that fostered community within marginalized gender groups. Speech acts ranged from performative declarations of identity to illocutionary acts of resistance against gender stereotyping. These findings affirm that digital discourse is not merely expressive but also performative and ideological—actively reshaping gendered subjectivities in the Philippine social media landscape.
3. On analyzing how gendered language in social media contributes to shaping perceptions of communication and identity, particularly within Filipino cultural and sociolinguistic norms: The study found that Filipino cultural values such as *hiya* (shame), *pakikisama* (social harmony), and *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) subtly influenced the way users performed and moderated their gendered communication. For example, assertive female users often mitigated their statements with politeness markers (*po*, *opo*) or emojis to soften perceived aggressiveness. In contrast, expressions of masculinity were frequently validated through humor and banter. The negotiation of identity in digital discourse was highly context-dependent, shaped by both platform affordances (e.g., hashtags, comment visibility) and prevailing sociocultural expectations.
4. On assessing the implications of gendered discourse on inclusivity, equality, and representation in alignment with RA 9710 (Magna Carta of Women): The findings suggest that while social media provides spaces for gender expression and empowerment, it also reproduces structural inequalities through language. Stereotypes about women as emotionally fragile or men as inherently dominant persist in 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 R 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 RA No. 11313 (Safe Spaces Act), such patterns also surface ethical concerns when profanity is weaponized in gendered harassment.

Feminine-Indexed Discourse Patterns:-

Feminine-aligned language use exhibited a contrasting set of features, typically characterized by:

- Affiliative and emotional tone, with heightened use of empathy markers and solidarity expressions (e.g., “Stay strong sis!” or “Kaya mo yan, love!”).
- Frequent use of emojis (e.g., ♥, ☺, 🥰, 🌸), visual symbols, and hashtags that emphasized emotional stance-taking and relational closeness.
- Use of hedging devices such as “I think,” “maybe,” or “just,” signaling politeness, non-imposition, or discursive tentativeness—a common linguistic pattern in traditionally feminized communication (Tannen, 1990).
- Preference for inclusive and supportive language, including expressions of affirmation, reassurance, and shared vulnerability.

These patterns align with gendered discourse traditions in Filipino digital culture, and echo educational calls for gender-fair, empathetic communication under DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017.

Emerging Non-Binary and Inclusive Markers:-

In addition to traditional binary distinctions, a notable cluster of posts reflected inclusive or non-binary language practices, such as:

- Use of gender-neutral pronouns (e.g., sila, Mx., mga friends) or deliberate avoidance of gendered terms.
- Adoption of queer vernacular and reappropriated slang, including Bekinese/“Swardspeak” forms (e.g., “char,” “push,” “pak ganern”) that both parody and celebrate fluid gender identities.
- Language play that challenged heteronormativity and traditional gender roles (e.g., “Ang tunay na lalaki, marunong umiyak at magmahal.” [A real man knows how to cry and love.]).

Such expressions reflect linguistic agency and performativity, as theorized by Butler (1990), where users actively construct and negotiate identities that subvert binary expectations. These innovations contribute to the pluralization of gender discourse in the Philippine digital sphere.

Code-Switching as a Gendered Discursive Strategy:-

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

- Express nuanced emotional or cultural meanings, often untranslatable in a single language (e.g., “Grabe siya, pero I get where she’s coming from. Maka-relate jud ko.”),
- Mark solidarity and shared regional or gender identities, especially in posts from Mindanao-based users, where Bisaya terms were used to evoke cultural rootedness 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 paninindigan."),
- 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. The dual presence of subversive and reproductive discourse within the same communicative space underscores the tension between progressive and patriarchal values in Philippine digital culture. While some users contribute to linguistic liberation, others unintentionally reinscribe dominant ideologies, highlighting the need for critical language awareness and intervention.

Discussion:-

The results of this study strongly affirm the position that Filipino social media spaces serve as dynamic, contested sites for the construction, negotiation, and performance of gendered identities. Drawing on a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of 300 purposively sampled social media texts, the study provides empirical evidence that language use on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and TikTok reflects both the entrenchment of traditional gender norms and the emergence of counter-discourses that subvert these norms. These linguistic behaviors are not isolated communicative acts but rather constitutive elements of gender identity performance and sociopolitical positioning, particularly for users navigating the complexities of contemporary Filipino gender ideologies.

Language as a Site of Gendered Identity Construction:-

Consistent with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity(as cited by Kakoliris, 2025), the findings illustrate how Filipino netizens—particularly youth and LGBTQ+ communities—use language to perform, affirm, and reconfigure gendered selves. For instance, the recurrent use of code-switching, especially between English, Filipino,

and Bisaya, reveals the strategic linguistic hybridity that enables users to traverse cultural boundaries and express nuanced gender positions. Code-switching in this context does not merely serve pragmatic communicative functions; it also indexes shifting gender ideologies, such as when users use English to signal progressive stances on non-binary identity or Filipino to express affective solidarity. Similarly, the intentional use of inclusive pronouns (e.g., “sila” as a singular referent) and gender-neutral terms (e.g., “partner” instead of “girlfriend/boyfriend”) marks a significant linguistic evolution toward gender sensitivity and inclusivity in online interaction. These forms actively resist the grammatical and sociocultural constraints of gender binaries inherent in both Filipino and English. They also illustrate how online users participate in the linguistic innovation required to represent emerging gender identities, especially those that fall outside of cisnormative and heteronormative frameworks.

Subversion and Reproduction of Gender Norms:-

The discursive landscape revealed a duality of gendered expression: while many users consciously subvert normative ideologies through humor, satire, or reclaimed language (e.g., swardspeak or “beki speak”), a substantial number still unconsciously reproduce gender stereotypes. This includes language that associates emotionality with femininity, authority with masculinity, and vulnerability with weakness—reflecting the enduring cultural residues of patriarchal norms in Filipino communication. The presence of such binary discourses, even in digital spaces presumed to be democratizing, demonstrates how digital platforms are not inherently progressive but rather mirror the ideological tensions of broader Filipino society. Fairclough’s three-dimensional 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 harassment. These legal frameworks amplify the urgency of critically engaging with how language is used—and often misused—in online platforms.

Thus, this research validates the necessity of:

- Institutionalizing gender-fair and inclusive language policies, particularly in digital communication, education, and media sectors;
- Integrating inclusive communication training in both formal and non-formal education systems to foster respect for gender diversity;
- Promoting critical digital literacy, equipping users with the ability to analyze, evaluate, and ethically participate in online discourse.

Finally, this study advances the national and global commitment to gender equality, responsible digital citizenship, and linguistic human rights, as articulated not only in Philippine legal instruments but also in international frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021), which recognizes the centrality of inclusive language in shaping equitable digital futures. This research contributes to both theoretical and applied linguistics by illuminating how social media discourse reflects, resists, and reshapes gendered identities in the Philippines—marking a critical intersection between language, power, and identity in the digital age. Consequently, the study highlights the dynamic and performative nature of gendered language use in Filipino social media discourse. As digital spaces become extensions of social reality, language therein functions both as a mirror and a maker of identity. The analysis reveals the dual nature of online discourse: as a site for both stereotype reinforcement and resistance.

Pedagogical and Institutional Recommendations:-

In light of the empirical insights, it is recommended that gender-sensitive discourse modules be explicitly integrated into the communication, linguistics, and education curricula at the tertiary level. These modules should:

- Include critical discussions on pronoun use, code-switching, and gender ideologies in both Filipino and global contexts;
- Examine digital discourse as a sociolinguistic and ideological field, thereby training students to identify and resist subtle forms of gender stereotyping;
- Promote multilingual and multicultural sensitivity, particularly recognizing how regional languages like “Bisaya” intersect with gender performance and identity expression.

Faculty development programs should be introduced to train educators in inclusive linguistic frameworks that reflect both contemporary sociolinguistic realities and legal imperatives. Educational institutions, as agents of social transformation, are tasked with cultivating critical citizens who are not only proficient communicators but also ethical language users committed to social justice and equality. Consequently, the discursive practices observed on Filipino social media platforms demonstrate that language is far more than a medium of expression—it is an arena of gender identity construction, negotiation, and contestation.

The findings of this research reveal a landscape where users variously reinforce, reframe, or rupture gender norms through language, contributing to a richer understanding of the evolving dynamics of Filipino identity in the digital age. By situating these practices within a legal-educational framework, this study makes a case for the institutionalization of gender-fair communication in both policy and pedagogy, ensuring that platforms like social media do not merely reflect but actively shape a more inclusive and equitable Philippine society.

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