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Trans Women's Digital Visibility in Kerala:
Economic Opportunities, Precarity, and
Resilience

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Abstract

This study depicts how transgender women in Kerala use social media platforms like YouTube and Instagram to express themselves, build communities, and earn a livelihood. In a state known for its high digital literacy and equally entrenched social conservatism, these women find in the digital space both opportunities and challenges. They create content that ranges from day-in-my-life vlogs, beauty tutorials, reaction videos, to personal stories and social commentary, reaching wide audiences and often creating niche followings. However, their visibility online also comes with risks, as trolling, burnout, platform-based restrictions, and economic instability are a constant reality. Based on interviews with trans women content creators and an analysis of their public online content, this study documents how digital platforms are reshaping what it means to be seen, heard, and economically self-reliant for gender-diverse individuals. It highlights both the practical strategies and emotional labor involved in being a content creator while navigating societal prejudice and platform algorithms. The study uses a case-based, qualitative approach and reflects on the participants' willingness, fatigue, and even refusal to engage, treating these moments not as gaps, but as meaningful expressions of agency. Rather than treating these creators as passive subjects, the project recognizes them as active agents in shaping their own digital narratives. This project contributes to conversations on gender, technology, and online livelihoods by focusing on real-world experiences in a specific regional and cultural context. It invites greater attention to how digital platforms, tools, and technologies are being used not only to survive but to thrive, even in the face of systemic exclusion. At a time when digital media plays a central role in public life, understanding how marginalized voices engage with social media platforms is essential for creating more inclusive and equitable digital futures.

Keywords:

Transwomen, Kerala, Digital Content Creation, Social Media, Online Livelihood, Visibility, Resilience, Trolling, Burnout, Gender and Technology

Introduction

In today's world, where almost every aspect of human life, from work and education to relationships and activism, is mediated by technology, the digital realm has become inseparable from lived reality. Physical boundaries blur as identities, economies, and communities increasingly take shape within screens and networks. In this new order, where digitality frames how we connect, represent, and survive, online spaces have opened unprecedented avenues for communication and livelihood, while simultaneously redrawing the politics of visibility, especially for marginalized gender identities as they navigate complex digital terrains.

At the heart of this disruption and transformation is the digital revolution, which, over the decades, has reshaped business models, governance, education, social structures, and human relationships, including networks. The digital revolution, commonly associated with the third industrial revolution, has fundamentally transformed global economies, communication systems, social identity formation, and power structures. This paper adopts the framework of networked communication within the digital revolution to examine how digital environments mediate identity and visibility. As Sherry Turkle (1995) argues that computers function beyond their instrumental capacity as tools to become environments that fundamentally reshape how we conceptualize identity formation. Digital media, she contends, enable users to experiment with multiple personas, constructing complex and performative selves within cyberspace.

Zizi Papacharissi's (2011) concept of the "networked self" further elaborates this dynamic, describing how digital identity formation is characterized by fluidity, multiplicity, and collaborative construction through continuous engagement with online communities. danah boyd (2011) similarly explores how "networked publics" fundamentally alter the landscape of social visibility, arguing that digital platforms simultaneously expand possibilities for self-expression while introducing novel forms of exposure and risk. This tension between opportunity and vulnerability holds particular significance for marginalized communities, whose online presence tends to be simultaneously hyper visible and precarious within the algorithmic frameworks that govern digital spaces. Most crucially, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2016) challenges the celebratory discourse around digital visibility. In 'Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media', she contends that online identities operate as programmable and commodified entities, asserting that visibility, rather than being inherently empowering, can reinforce systems of surveillance and exploitation. Through her critical examination of the techno-social infrastructures that both facilitate and limit identity performance, Chun reconceptualizes digital visibility as a contested terrain where possibilities for agency coexist with mechanisms of control.

In the age of digital connectivity, identity is no longer confined to physical spaces but is increasingly shaped, performed, and contested across digital platforms. This shift signals a profound transformation in how individuals relate to themselves and others.

As Sherry Turkle (1995) observes, the internet allows people to adopt multiple personas, offering both escape and experimentation, especially for those whose identities may be marginalized or suppressed offline. Additionally, Manuel Castells argues in 'The Power of Identity', that "identity is people's source of meaning and experience" (Castells, 2010, p. 8), and identity in the network society is not a passive inheritance but an active construction, often shaped through resistance against dominant power structures. In a world increasingly mediated by digital networks, identities are created, negotiated, and redefined as individuals and marginalized communities assert their presence against forces of exclusion and control. In the digital era, the forces of global connectivity and local identity are increasingly entangled, producing both opportunities for expression and struggle for recognition. As Castells (2010) notes, "Our world, and our lives, are being shaped by the conflicting trends of globalization and identity" (p.1).

Within this broader landscape of identity construction in digital spaces, the experiences of transgender individuals are particularly significant as they navigate digital information sharing or social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) both to assert their identities and to resist societal marginalization. Digital spaces offer transgender people unprecedented opportunities for visibility, community-building, and self-representation. Tobias Raun (2016) in 'Out Outline: Trans Self-Representation and Community Building on YouTube' argues that one of the digital platforms, YouTube, has become a crucial space for transgender individuals to document their transitions, share personal narratives, build supportive communities, and resist dominant, medicalized representations of trans identities. The vlog as a medium becomes a multifaceted mirror, enabling self-creation and self-labelling, while also establishing contact and interaction with like-minded others who can encourage and support one's (transitioned) self-recognition. YouTube as a platform becomes a site for identification, for trying out and assuming various identities, and for seeing one's own experiences and thoughts reflected in others" (Raun, 2016, p.108).

Yet this visibility is precarious, as the same can expose them to real-world risks, surveillance, harassment, and exploitation as observed by Andre Cavalcante (2016) in 'I Did It All Online: Transgender Identity and the Management of Everyday Life'. For the transgender individual, digital platforms emerge as a double-edged sword; one that can affirm existence and visibility but also intensify precarity and vulnerability. Among transgender individuals, the digital experiences of trans women are particularly complex and layered. Kim Cannerstad (2019) demonstrates that trans women face disproportionate online harassment due to intersecting biases, while platforms' algorithmic systems often fail to address transphobic abuse, forcing them to find refuge in niche communities like Kadath. Clearly, this intersection of transphobia and misogyny on digital platforms creates a particularly dangerous environment for transgender women, who face specific forms of online abuse, including deliberate misgendering, exposure of private information (doxxing), and explicit threats of violence. This combination of targeted harassment tactics places transgender women in an especially precarious and vulnerable position on digital platforms.

Therefore, digital platforms offer paradoxical possibilities: on the one hand, social media platforms function as sites of empowerment, visibility, economic sustenance, and community building, while they also act as sites of vulnerability, conflict, surveillance, hatred, and harassment. Nowhere is this paradox more palpable than in Kerala, India's most digitally literate state, where trans women navigate these digital terrains in complex, often contradictory ways. Against this backdrop, this work examines how social media platforms, YouTube and Instagram, shape the visibility of transgender women within Kerala's digital culture. It further explores how these individuals navigate these online spaces to assert identity, pursue economic opportunities, and cultivate resilience amidst systemic precarity. This study adopts a qualitative, case-based approach grounded in in-depth semi-structured interviews and content analysis. It does not aim for statistical generalization but instead centres the lived digital experiences of a select group of transgender women content creators in Kerala, offering rich insight into broader social and structural patterns.

While Kerala is often celebrated for its progressive social indicators, such as high literacy rates, robust public healthcare, and strong welfare initiatives, under what is popularly known as the "Kerala Model" (Franke & Chasin, 1994), this developmental narrative often masks the persistence of deeply rooted patriarchal norms. In contrast to the perception of social modernity, the historical construction of individual subjectivity in Kerala was profoundly gendered. As J. Devika (2006) argues in 'En-Gendering Individuals: The Language of Reforming in Early Twentieth Century Keralam', the very emergence of the individual in early 20th-century Kerala was both a product of modern reform and a site of gendered regulation. She introduces the dual notion of the individual being simultaneously "engendered"—coming into being as a modern subject—and "en-gendered"—structured through dominant gender norms (p. 18). This means that the formation of modern subjecthood in Kerala was not universal or neutral, but rather deeply embedded in a binary framework that imposed specific roles, expectations, and limitations based on gender. What makes Kerala's case distinct is that this gendered subject formation occurred in tandem with, and was in many ways shaped by, the region's unique history of social reform, matriliney, caste politics, and nationalist movements, all of which contributed to complex and often contradictory articulations of femininity, masculinity, and individuality

Patriarchal structures and heteronormativity regulating gender performance and identity leave little room for expressions that fall outside this dominant framework. In the light of this regulation of gender transgression and traditional gender expectations, trans women occupy a uniquely marginalized position. As Poornima R (2021) observes in 'Visibility and Social Acceptability of Kerala's Transgender Population: A Comparative Study of the Periods before and after the Transgender Policy', that expressing gender identity in Kerala was especially difficult due to the lack of "visible transgender presence and the rigid, conformist society that discouraged any challenge to social norms and existing gender structure and social stigma is rampant" (p. 150). A similar observation is made by Fenn J et.al. (2020) who state that "the society in Kerala does not have a separate space for transgender people as in the rest of India, which is both good and bad for the transgenders in the State" (para.6)

These perspectives align with the observations made in the Supreme Court's historic ruling in the NALSA vs. Union of India case, delivered on 15 April 2014. "Transgender community... sidelined and treated as untouchables, forgetting the fact that the moral failure lies in the society's unwillingness to contain or embrace different gender identities and expressions, a mindset which we have to change."

According to the Transgender Survey Kerala 2014-15 conducted by Sangama for the Department of Social Justice, Government of Kerala, "transgender people face injustice from their families, schools, workplaces, markets and shops, hotel front desk, doctor's offices, emergency rooms, public places, and at the hands of landlords, police officers, health care workers and other service providers" (2015, 60). In response to the persistent marginalization of transgender individuals, both the Indian central government and the Government of Kerala have introduced policy frameworks aimed at ensuring legal recognition, protection, and inclusion. The 2014 National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) vs Union of India judgement, where the Court upheld that all persons have the right to self-identify their gender. It declared that hijras and eunuchs can legally identify as "third gender" and clarified that "gender identity did not refer to biological characteristics but rather referred to it as "an innate perception of one's gender." (Centre for Law & Policy Research, n.d). The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, although met with criticism and differing opinions within the transgender community, represented a legal step toward recognizing and safeguarding their existence and identity. The latest Transgender Persons (Protections of Rights) Rules 2020, to enact the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, cover three key areas of transgender rights: legal recognition, discrimination protection, and welfare scheme access.

Building on this national legal recognition, the Government of Kerala in 2015 introduced its own state-level transgender policy to ensure targeted support and inclusion. The State Policy for Transgenders in Kerala, 2015, aims for a just society, where transgenders also enjoy equal rights to "live with dignity" and "freedom of expression" (State Policy for Transgenders in Kerala, 2015). Despite legal recognition at both the national and the state levels, transgender individuals, especially trans women, still face severe social invisibility and violence and often lack access to even the most basic facilities required for a life of dignity and well-being. For the trans women in Kerala, their mere existence itself is precarious, as on one hand, there is increased institutional recognition, and on the other hand, there is persistent social stigmatization.

Kerala, notably, is the first Indian state to achieve total digital literacy (Praveen, 2025). It is often celebrated for its progressive stance on education, health, and social indicators. Digital platforms, particularly content creation and social media sites, have increasingly become spaces for social, political, and economic interaction and participation. Understanding how marginalized communities navigate these spaces becomes essential for developing inclusive digital policies. The digital advancement in Kerala then raises critical questions about inclusion: How do trans women experience, access, and navigate these digital spaces? Their digital lives, situated at the intersection of visibility, vulnerability, and resilience, offer a compelling site of inquiry into the contradictions between policy promises, digital empowerment, and lived realities.

Given the continued marginalization of transgender women in their everyday lives, it becomes crucial to ask: what does their digital lived experience look like? And why do they choose to be digitally visible?

To this end, the major questions guiding this research inquiry are:

1. How do transgender women acquire the digital skills necessary for content creation, self-promotion, and brand promotions, and utilize the digital space as a source of income?
2. What drives the viewership of transgender vlogs –curiosity, empathy, fetishization, voyeuristic curiosity, or something else? What kind of content garners the most attention, and what are the patterns in the language used in social media comment sections?
3. Are transgender individuals in Kerala welcomed in the digital space? How does the digital culture in Kerala impact their online experiences, and how effective are current cyber laws in protecting transgender women from discrimination, harassment, and abuse on digital platforms?

Collectively, this study examines how transgender women in Kerala use social media platforms, specifically Instagram and YouTube, not merely as content creators, but as active agents who negotiate identity, community, and livelihood in digital spaces. By centering their lived digital experiences, the research critically engages with broader debates on platform politics, algorithmic visibility, digital precarity, and the disjuncture between policy-level recognition and the everyday realities of trans existence.

Review of Literature

In the contemporary world, literature on digital spaces constitutes the centre of critical discussions on issues around identity, power, money, and social interaction. Studies and contemporary discourses and events reiterate how social media acts as a double-edged sword for marginalized communities, providing both opportunities for visibility and income while also exposing them to online harassment and hate speech. Studies and contemporary events reiterate how social media acts as a double-edged sword for marginalized identities, offering visibility and livelihood opportunities while exposing them to hate and harassment. A heartbreaking example is the case of 16-year-old Priyanshu Yadav (also known as 'Pranshu'), who died by suicide in November 2023 after receiving over 4,000 homophobic and transphobic comments on an Instagram post (Times of India, 2023). Another such case is that of the 24-year-old man, V. Kalaiyaran from Chennai, who ended his life after being cyberbullied for dressing as a woman and uploading a video on social media (Hindustan Times, 2018). While direct causal links are difficult to establish, mental health experts and LGBTQ+ advocates point to online harassment as a significant contributing factor in both cases.

Despite the increasing visibility of transgender individuals in digital spaces, scholarly literature remains uneven in how it addresses their roles as active content creators and economic agents, particularly in non-Western contexts. Globally, a growing body of work has examined how trans women engage with social media to build communities, perform identity, and access support systems. These studies focus on the affective, representational, and therapeutic affordances of digital platforms. However, in the Indian context, in Kerala more specifically, existing literature tends to frame transgender individuals either as recipients of state recognition or as symbolic figures of empowerment, without sufficient attention to their active participation in digital economies or the everyday politics of platform labor. This review critically maps the current scholarship and identifies the conceptual and geographic gaps that this study seeks to fill: the absence of work focusing on transgender women in Kerala as digital content creators negotiating identity, livelihood, and visibility amid systemic precarity and vulnerability.

Tobias Raun (2016) explores how transgender individuals use YouTube for self-representation and community building, challenging mainstream narratives and creating spaces for connection and support. It examines the complexities and nuances of trans identity formation in the digital age. Oliver Lee Haimson's (2018) 'The Social Complexities of Transgender Identity Disclosure on Social Media', provides a nuanced understanding of how transgender individuals navigate social media during gender transition, emphasizing the role of technology in facilitating identity reconstruction, social support, and emotional well-being. It also challenges dominant narratives and offers valuable insights for designing more inclusive and supportive online environments. Kim Cannerstad's (2020) 'Women Without Borders -How Trans Women Find Themselves Online' examines how trans women utilize online support communities, specifically discussing a community called Kadath, to find a positive identity and combat feelings of loneliness and isolation. It examines how they "do femininity" through NSFW-erotica, the benefits of knowledge sharing in support channels, and the challenges administrators face in maintaining a safe online environment, while also addressing issues like transmedicalist ideology. Globally, these literatures highlight how transgender individuals, particularly trans women, use digital platforms for self-representation, identity reconstruction, and community support while navigating complex challenges related to visibility, safety, and platform norms.

In the Indian context, scholarly work on transgender identity and digital visibility remains limited, but emerging studies and publications are beginning to explore how digital platforms intersect with gender, marginality, and self-representation in online spaces.

However, Reshma Prasad's (2019), 'Making Visible: Transgenders in social media' analyzes the impact of social media on transgender individuals in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, focusing on the role of platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp in consciousness-raising, identity work, and challenging traditional media portrayals, while acknowledging the prevalence of transphobia and its effects on their visibility and well-being. Prasad concludes the article by saying: "... transgender people are deeply dissatisfied with the way they are portrayed by the media...It also strongly suggests that such representations inspire at least some of the verbal and physical abuse that transgender people experience in their day-to-day lives, and that they can be a significant factor in family breakdown. This representation impedes the entry of transgenders of Thiruvananthapuram into the social media" (Prasad, 2019, p.194).

Delfi Chinnappan's (2020) 'Digital media and Hijra identity: Understanding community building and self-representations among hijra community-based organisations in India', explores how hijra community-based organizations (CBOs) in India use social media, particularly Facebook, to negotiate their identities and build community representations. It examines digitally mediated LGBTQ+ groups, transgender communities in global and Indian contexts, and the social organization and culture of the hijra community, highlighting the need for research on the hijra community's use of digital media for self-representation. Poornima R's (2021) 'Visibility and Social Acceptability of Kerala's Transgender Population' argues that while Kerala's transgender policy has increased the visibility of the transgender community, social stigma persists, hindering the policy's effective implementation and highlighting the need for greater gender sensitization and social acceptance. Aneesh M S and Jilly John's (2020) 'A Reason to Rejoice - The Empowerment of Transgender Women in Kerala, India', examines the challenges and empowerment of transgender women in Kerala, India, highlighting the social stigma, lack of fair treatment, and the positive impact of self-empowerment and community role models in overcoming these issues, while also acknowledging the need for greater social acceptance and effective implementation of transgender policies. Jayalakshmi L and Anishia Jayadev's (2024) 'Breaking Barriers: Transgender Visibility and Passing in Kerala', explores transgender visibility and the concept of "passing"—the idea that transgender individuals need to conform to societal norms and expectations in order to be accepted in Kerala" (p.1), examining the challenges faced by transgender individuals, societal expectations, and initiatives promoting inclusivity, while also questioning the necessity of passing for acceptance. While Manoj Chathoth's (2024) 'Financial Independence Among Transgenders in Kerala' examines the financial independence of transgender people in Kerala, India, finding that while they are literate and often employed, they face significant financial challenges due to societal transphobia, limited asset ownership, and reliance on loans for medical expenses. The paper suggests policy interventions such as increased scholarships, job reservations, and affordable loans to improve their financial well-being.

While existing Indian scholarship has begun to explore transgender identity and digital visibility, particularly through social media's role in community-building, self-representation, and policy visibility, most of these studies (Chinnappan, 2020; Poornima, 2021) focus either on broad patterns of representation or institutional/community-level engagement. Though some Kerala-based works address issues of empowerment, social stigma, financial marginalization, and visibility (Prasad, 2019; Aneesh & John, 2020; Jayalakshmi & Jayadev, 2024; Chathoth, 2024), they tend to inadvertently treat transgender individuals as recipients of representation or policy rather than as active digital agents and content creators. There remains a clear gap in research that specifically examines transgender women in Kerala as creators of digital content, as individuals who not only seek visibility but also engage with platforms like YouTube and Instagram for income generation, identity performance, and community resilience, while simultaneously navigating platform precarity, algorithmic marginalization, and societal transphobia. This study addresses that gap by centering trans women's voices and practices within Kerala's digital landscape, offering a focused analysis of their lived digital experiences as content creators, and examining how they negotiate both opportunity and exclusion in a socio-digital environment shaped by policy rhetoric, patriarchy, and platform capitalism.

Apart from this, it has become clear that geography-specific studies remain limited, making this project essential to understanding the intersection of gender identity, digital culture, and economic survival. By looking at the critical gaps that exist in examining regional contexts, such as Kerala, and the specific experiences of transgender women navigating digital spaces, this study, with its focus on the intersection of economic, social, and digital identities within Kerala's unique socio-cultural landscape, aspires to provide fresh insights into the visibility and resilience of transgender women in the digital culture of Kerala. This study can later serve as a guide to the successful strategies used by prominent transgender women to create engaging content and build acceptance and popularity. Apart from this, the significance of the study is in its capacity to fill gaps within current literature, specifically by providing first-hand narratives of transgender women content creators engaged in content creation, digital entrepreneurship, and online activism. Placing their lives within the contexts of digital anthropology and gender research, this work seeks to advance policy debates about digital inclusion, platform governance, and economic equity for marginalized communities.

Research Objectives and Methodology

Framed by this reality, by exploring the intersection of gender, digital culture, and economic opportunity, this work aims to offer valuable insights into the possibilities and limitations of social media platforms, YouTube, and Instagram for achieving visibility and self-sufficiency for transgender women in societies that profess to be liberal. The primary objectives of the research are:

1. To explore the motivations behind transgender women in Kerala engaging with social media platforms, such as YouTube, and Instagram, and how content creation enables identity assertion, community-building, and audience interaction within the state's digital culture.
2. To assess the role of social media in fostering economic opportunities and financial independence for transgender women, and identify the creative and strategic practices, transgender women use to enhance their digital visibility and resilience, and to evaluate the extent to which digital platforms support or hinder their inclusion, protection and participation.
3. To examine how they navigate the structural challenges they face, such as harassment, algorithmic invisibility, and content moderation, and to critically analyse the gap between state-led digital empowerment promises, legal protections, and the lived realities of trans women content creators.

Using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, the study adopts a mixed-method research design to explore the lived experiences of trans women content creators of Kerala in the digital space and understand how transgender women consciously use social media to gain visibility, generate income, and be resilient.

The research methodology and methods are:

1. Semi-structured Interview: In-depth semi-structured interviews with transgender women social media influencers and content creators.
2. Content Analysis and Social Media Analytics: Analysis of social media posts, vlogs, comment sections, and social media engagement metrics.

Sampling Strategy and Recruitment Approach

This study has adopted a purposive sampling strategy to identify transgender women content creators across various digital platforms, based primarily on their subscriber and follower counts. Given the project's timeline and budget, the sample comprises 10 trans women who are active on platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. The sample is inclusive, aiming to capture diverse levels of digital visibility, platform usage, and content styles. For the purposes of this research, digital visibility is classified into three tiers: high visibility (more than 50,000 followers), moderate visibility (5,000–50,000 followers), and low visibility (fewer than 5,000 followers). However, this categorization does not equate visibility with success; rather, the mere act of occupying digital space is acknowledged as a form of activism and subjectivity. Participants, YouTube channels, and Instagram pages are selected to reflect a spectrum of digital engagement and content types, including short reels, transient stories, and long-form vlogs. Content is chosen based on thematic relevance and levels of audience interaction (both high and low engagement).

Semi-structured interviews are conducted to collect qualitative data, which is then thematically analysed using concepts from standpoint theory to see how one's position in society determines what that person knows and to identify recurring patterns related to identity, challenges, and resilience. Informed consent is obtained after clearly explaining the study's purpose, scope, and potential implications. Although the participants in this study are public figures, some of them specifically requested that their names not be disclosed. In response to their concerns, and in keeping with ethical research practices, all interview excerpts in the upcoming sections will remain anonymous. Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews and the sensitivity of the topics discussed, this decision respects their right to privacy and ensures their safety in both online and offline contexts. All participants have received fair compensation for their time and contribution.

Selected Digital Profiles for Analysis

The selected content creators are from Kerala, and their mother tongue is Malayalam. All of the digital content they share on social media platforms is produced in Malayalam. The social media accounts for the study vary in terms of digital visibility and audience engagement, offering a diverse representation of content styles, platform usage, and thematic focus.

The following channels and Instagram pages are consulted for the study:

Name	Platform	Page ID /Channel Name	Follower Count (as on 20-04-2025)
Heidi Saadiya	Instagram YouTube	heidisaadiya_ Heidi Saadiya	> 50,000 > 3,00,000
Nadira Mehrin	Instagram YouTube	nadira_mehrin_offical Nadira Mehrin	>2,00,000 >2,00,000
Nived Antony	Instagram YouTube	nivinivedantony Nived Antony	> 2,00,000 >12,000
Daya Gayathri	Instagram YouTube	dayagayathri_ Daya Gayathri	> 1,50,000 >80,000
Sruthy Sithara	Instagram YouTube	sruthy_sithara_ Sruthy Sithara Speaks	> 1,50,000 >5,000
Anjali Ameer	Instagram YouTube	anjali_ameer_----- Anjali ameer	> 2,00,000 > 6,000
Surya Ishaan	Instagram YouTube	surya_ishaan surya ishaan	> 1,00,000 > 4,50,000
Seema Vineeth	Instagram YouTube	seemavineeth Seema the real makeup artist	> 4,90,000 > 2,80,000
Renju Renjimar	Instagram YouTube	Renjurenjimar Renju.Renjimar	> 3,50.000 > 2,80,000
Nyla Preeth	Instagram	nyla.preeth	> 1,000

These creators represent varying levels of digital visibility, ranging from low to high, and engage with diverse content formats such as vlogs, short reels, makeup tutorials, awareness videos, and day-in-the-life vlogs to document professional routines and personal storytelling. The trans women content creators interviewed are: Heidi Saadiya, Nadira Mehrin, Nived Antony, Daya Gayathri, and Sruthy Sithara. Their experiences, as revealed through interviews and content analysis, offer critical insights into the complexities of being visible, vulnerable, and agentive in Kerala's evolving digital culture and further explore how these individuals navigate these online spaces to assert identity, pursue economic opportunities, and cultivate resilience amidst systemic precarity.

Findings and Analysis

The following sections delve deeper into these lived realities. The following section, titled 'Digital Precarity: Trans Women's Vulnerability on Social Media Platforms', explores the risks and exclusions that accompany digital visibility. It includes two sub-sections: 'Policing the Platforms' Harassment and Misgendering', which examines harassment and misgendering, and 'State Promises vs Digital Precarity: A Policy Gap', which investigates the gap between progressive policies and the actual online challenges faced by trans women.

The subsequent section, titled ‘Digital Resilience: Economic Empowerment and Community Building through Online Platforms’, shifts the focus to resilience, resistance, and agency. It begins with ‘Social Media Platforms as Tools of Income and Identity’, exploring how trans women strategically use social media for livelihood and self-representation. The second subsection, ‘Community Building and Activism as Resistance and Resilience’, highlights how online spaces become crucial sites for solidarity, mutual support, and the collective assertion of transgender identities in a hostile socio-digital environment.

While the previous discussions have outlined the scope, context, and participants of this study, the sections that follow turn to the heart of their digital experiences, beginning with an exploration of the vulnerabilities and exclusions they face as visibly trans women navigating Kerala’s social media landscape.

Digital Precarity: Trans Women’s Vulnerability on Social Media Platforms

Precarity stems from one’s positionality within society, shaped by structures of gender, caste, class, and sexuality, which determine who is protected, who is visible, and who remains vulnerable. So precarity, in its broadest sense, refers to a condition of persistent insecurity, social, economic, and existential, marked by a lack of stability, protection, or recognition. As Judith Butler explains, “precarity designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death” (2009, p. ii). In the context of this study, transgender individuals, and transgender women in particular, constitute such a population, as they remain structurally marginalized, socially excluded, and disproportionately vulnerable both offline and online.

For transgender individuals, especially trans women, precarity, unlike general vulnerability, is not a passive state but a condition actively produced by structural inequalities: discrimination in employment, healthcare, housing, and social acceptance. Their identities are often marginalized or pathologized, resulting in heightened exposure to violence, exclusion, and psychological distress. When these vulnerabilities carry over into digital spaces, they give rise to what scholars term digital precarity: a condition shaped by algorithmic control, visibility risks, platform instability, and a lack of protective infrastructure. While digital precarity is often framed as a universal condition emerging from rapid technological change, this perspective can obscure how precarity is differentially distributed. As the Digital Precarity Manifesto (2019) reminds us to “resist tropes of crisis thinking that assume a universal state of precarity as a new, urgent state of being, prompted by digital tools” (p.77). To transgender women content creators, precarity is not new; it extends from long histories of marginalization, social exclusion, and gender-based violence. What digital platforms do, however, is reconfigure and amplify these vulnerabilities in new ways. For transgender women content creators, digital precarity becomes most evident not only in the act of making themselves visible online but in the emotional cost of doing so.

The real precarity does not lie in the content they put out; it lies in the comment sections that follow. While the content they produce is not itself a form of precarity, it renders them vulnerable to harm and abuse, risks that arise from the precarious structural conditions they inhabit which is their identity, and the comments section reveals the space. These social media platforms, apparently meant for engagement, are often sites of intense harassment, slut-shaming, misgendering, and dehumanization. While platforms offer visibility, they also become arenas of public scrutiny, where trans women must constantly negotiate between self-expression and self-protection. Thus, digital precarity for them is not just about unstable incomes, low follower numbers, or fluctuating algorithms; it is the ongoing risk of being emotionally wounded, socially erased, or hyper-visible for the wrong reasons.

To concretely illustrate the concept of digital precarity, this section presents the case of a transgender woman content creator (as mentioned previously, without naming a specific individual) and model from Kerala that the researcher interviewed, whose experiences exemplify the overlapping burdens of gender-based marginalization and platform-mediated vulnerability. Classified as a high-visibility content creator, she stands out as one of the most prominent figures in Kerala's trans digital landscape. Her journey into social media visibility began with a deeply personal motivation: to challenge the stereotype of transgender lives being reducible to sensationalist news, and to demonstrate that trans women, too, lead ordinary, dignified lives.

She first gained public recognition through TikTok, where her lip-syncing, acting, and writing skills captured the attention of a wide audience. Her videos received positive feedback, including praise for her fashion and presentation. Significantly, cisgender individuals from across professional fields, doctors, artists, and educators, reached out to her in friendship. "I am also a human being just like others," she noted, emphasizing that her decision to become digitally visible was rooted in a desire for equal social recognition. Her detailed YouTube video explaining transgender anatomy had garnered over 800,000 views and more than 6,000 likes. Another video documenting her male-to-female transition has also gained significant attention, surpassing 500,000 views and receiving over 20,000 likes.

Despite this support, the comments beneath her content often reflect a deeper social hostility. Her presence online makes her a target of relentless slut-shaming, transphobic slurs, and sexualised objectification. While she consciously aligns her content with Kerala's cultural boundaries of *sadachara bodham* (moral consciousness), the comment sections frequently degenerate into spaces of verbal violence and dehumanization. Viewers regularly cross the line, asking invasive questions about her body, calling her *ombathu* (the Malayalam word for the number nine, which is often used colloquially and mockingly as a derogatory slang term to refer to transgender individuals in Kerala), and making unsolicited sexual suggestions. One video discussing sexuality and orgasm triggered a flood of perverse comments, with people asking for sexual favors or one-night stands. The cruel and anonymous judgment she faces echoes the widespread societal stereotype of trans women as beggars or sex workers, a framing that invalidates her identity and labor.

These experiences underscore the emotional toll of digital precarity. “I have come this far, undergoing struggles no one can imagine,” she reflected, “It’s heartbreaking, struggling each and every second.” The cruel and anonymous judgments she faces echo the widespread societal stereotype of trans women as beggars or sex workers, a framing that invalidates her identity and labor. She powerfully challenges the generalization:



“If one man commits a crime, we don’t say all men are rapists. Likewise, when women like Jolly or Greeshma are involved in heinous acts, society does not generalize that all women are criminal-minded. But when a single transgender person is seen as crossing a moral boundary, the entire transgender community is branded and condemned. This generalization is not accidental; it is deliberate, socially sanctioned, and visibly reflected in the comment sections beneath our content. The trans community continues to bear the burden of collective judgment, denied the dignity of individual identity.”

The link between her trans identity and the abuse she receives is unambiguous. Hate speech, false accusations (e.g., about HIV status), and even cyber threats, such as having her photos morphed or her videos maliciously edited and reposted, have become part of her digital routine. She has filed four cyber complaints, but no action has been taken. “The legal system thinks these are irrelevant issues,” she remarked, exposing the indifference of legal authorities toward transgender experiences online. She recalled facing hostility from officials when she attempted to lodge the complaints, highlighting the precarious position of transgender individuals who must navigate an unresponsive legal system while seeking protection from online harassment.

From the standpoint theory perspective, her insights and resistance are valuable precisely because they emerge from the margins. Her lived experience gives her a unique epistemic privilege to critique both societal and platform injustices. Her presence, though vulnerable, is inherently political—her account and page, as she states, are acts of activism. Yet this activism is unprotected. She must continue to produce content to remain relevant within platform algorithms, even when doing so endangers her mental health.

This case encapsulates digital precarity not as a universal crisis, but as one shaped by structural transphobia, platform neglect, and a lack of institutional redress. Her story demonstrates how trans women are made hyper-visible in the most exploitative ways and simultaneously denied the protections that visibility demands.

Policing the Platforms: Harassment and Misgendering

While digital platforms offer transgender women new avenues for expression and connection, these same platforms often become sites of intense vulnerability. The visibility that trans women achieve through YouTube and Instagram frequently comes at the cost of personal safety, mental health, and dignity. As seen above, interview participants repeatedly mentioned experiences of targeted abuse, including verbal harassment, threats of violence, trolling, and doxxing. Their gender identity makes them particularly susceptible to transphobic slurs, online bullying, and in some extreme cases, death threats.

One recurring theme that emerges from the comments under the videos and posts in their accounts is sexual fetishization, which could be looked at as a curiosity centered on their transformed bodies that objectifies them as sources of intrigue and reduces trans women content creators to objects of fascination rather than complete individuals. As a result, trans women content creators often find themselves exoticised or reduced to their gender identity by male audiences. Thus, the gaze is both objectifying and intrusive, as it often disregards the creator's intended message or purpose of the content. Several participants noted receiving inappropriate messages, unsolicited comments, and sexualised responses even to non-sexual posts. For creators who aim to share everyday stories, awareness campaigns, or artistic work, such interactions are both emotionally exhausting and alienating. Another layer of vulnerability emerges in the way platform moderation policies are applied. Content that shows fully clothed trans women discussing gender or showcasing their appearance is often flagged or taken down under vague guidelines related to nudity or sexual content. These inconsistent enforcement patterns suggest a biased moderation system where trans bodies are disproportionately scrutinized. This form of digital policing marginalizes trans creators further and undermines their efforts to build supportive audiences.

In addition to overt moderation, several creators described experiencing algorithmic invisibility. Despite having a regular posting schedule and engaged audiences, their content was not recommended, or worse, was shadowbanned. This invisibility severely affects reach, engagement, and opportunities for income generation. In these moments, the promise of digital freedom is undermined by invisible structures that punish non-conformity and gender non-normativity. One content creator revealed that one of her videos received three strikes, though she has been unable to determine the reason for these violations.

Such experiences are not isolated but rather systematic, pointing to a wider pattern of platform bias and digital precarity. While trans creators continue to occupy and reshape digital spaces, they do so under constant threat of erasure, misrepresentation, and structural discrimination.

State Promises vs Digital Precarity: A Policy Gap

Kerala is often hailed as a progressive state, particularly after introducing the Transgender Policy in 2015 and achieving full digital literacy. However, the lived experiences of transgender women in digital spaces reveal a profound gap between progressive policy on paper and precarious digital realities. Many participants expressed frustration with how state-led digital empowerment initiatives fail to include or support them in meaningful ways. As revealed from the interview, trans women often face exclusion from digital training programs, lack access to institutional funding for content creation, and rarely benefit from skill development schemes. Despite being literate, expressive, and socially active, they are rarely viewed as deserving candidates for digital or entrepreneurial support. Instead, tokenistic gestures of representation take precedence over structural inclusion.

One of the most critical gaps in legal protection lies in the limited recognition of transgender-specific vulnerabilities under existing online sexual harassment laws. While cisgender women often find legal recourse under well-defined provisions, transgender individuals are frequently left navigating vague or inapplicable sections. Rather than proposing a separate law, this paper argues for the meaningful inclusion of transgender persons within existing frameworks to ensure equal protection and targeted redress. Though the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 (TPA) prescribes imprisonment and fines up to two years for offenses such as violence, abuse, and forced eviction whether online or offline (The Advocates for Human Rights) the penalties under the TPA are notably less severe than those for comparable crimes committed against cisgender women. This legal vacuum and inertia leave them particularly vulnerable to online abuse, blackmail, and exploitation with limited recourse or institutional support.

Participants also spoke of their disappointment with the state's inability to create safe digital ecosystems. While the Kerala model is praised for its welfare orientation, there is little evidence of institutional efforts to make digital platforms inclusive for marginalized gender identities. Instead, trans women often find themselves battling not only societal stigma but also digital neglect.

To address these gaps, the state must go beyond symbolic policy gestures. This includes creating targeted digital literacy programs for trans individuals, offering financial and infrastructural support for trans content creators, and enacting cyber protection laws that specifically recognize and address transgender realities online. Only through such inclusive measures can Kerala truly embody its progressive claims in both physical and digital spheres. The challenges and exclusions discussed in this chapter demonstrate the fragile terrain on which transgender women in Kerala build their digital presence. Yet, amid these layers of digital precarity, the trans women content creators are not merely surviving but actively shaping online spaces to create community, generate income, and assert their identities. The following section turns to these stories of agency and resistance.

Digital Resilience: Economic Empowerment and Community Building Through Online Platforms

Resilience is “the ability to be happy, successful, etc. again after something difficult or bad has happened” (Cambridge Dictionary Online). Resilience, in its broadest sense, refers to the capacity of individuals or communities to withstand, adapt to, and recover from adversity. It encompasses emotional, psychological, and structural responses to crisis and precarity. For marginalized populations such as transgender women, resilience is not merely a personal trait but a social and political necessity, shaped by continuous negotiation with systems of exclusion, stigma, and violence. It reflects a refusal to be defined by victimhood and a will to assert one's identity, dignity, and agency despite structural disadvantage.

In the digital age, this concept expands into digital resilience, the ability to endure and adapt to challenges specifically within digital environments. For transgender women content creators, digital resilience involves navigating hostile comment sections, algorithmic invisibility, content takedowns, and systemic misrecognition on social media platforms. Yet, despite these challenges, many trans women in Kerala continue to assert their presence online through storytelling, education, humor, and creativity. Their digital resilience is not passive survival; it is a form of active resistance, where self-representation, economic agency, and community solidarity coalesce to challenge dominant narratives and reclaim space in a hostile digital terrain.

A trans woman content creator from Kerala, classified as a high-visibility digital creator, exemplifies the intersection of digital resilience, visibility, and self-authored identity. Her journey into content creation began in 2019 as part of a New Media external assessment during her postgraduate diploma at the Press Club. Assigned to upload a one-minute story, she chose to document a behind-the-scenes glimpse of a drama rehearsal by a trans troupe. The video unexpectedly went viral, accumulating over a lakh views, and sparked a steady stream of audience engagement. Motivated by the response, she transitioned into regular vlogging, chronicling her daily life, educational journey, and community activities. Her experience highlights the transformative power of standpoint-based media production, where her identity and lived reality as a trans woman from a minority community uniquely position her to tell stories that mainstream media often silences or distorts. For instance, she draws from her own lived experience of becoming an outcast within her community and family after coming out as transgender. Her digital contents, rooted in first-person narrative and creative control, serve as a form of counter-discourse, reclaiming both narrative authority and public space. By positioning herself as both subject and narrator, she disrupts the conventional dynamic where transgender individuals are spoken about rather than spoken with. This self-authored content challenges dominant discourses that have historically marginalized transgender voices while simultaneously creating new spaces for authentic representation and community building.

She self-produces and edits her videos, having taught herself camera handling and editing on an Oppo smartphone and her go-to editing app is the InShot app. Her favorite platform remains YouTube, where she describes her subscriber base as a “digital family”, longtime followers who have remained consistently supportive. By contrast, she finds Instagram less stable, more prone to trolling, and algorithmically less forgiving.

Importantly, she notes that brand collaborations are not restricted by her gender identity, though she is selective and intentional about the products she promotes. For her, content creation is not just a source of income but an extension of identity, a place where transparency, dignity, and integrity matter. The comments and interactions she values the most come from cisgender women, particularly in the 18–35 age group, who express acceptance and admiration. Her digital labor is thus not simply performative, it is reparative and relational, creating mutual understanding across gendered divides.

Beyond income and personal branding, she views her digital presence as a form of resistance and community mobilization. While Kerala's offline space often marginalizes trans individuals, her platform becomes a virtual common: a place for connection, solidarity, and storytelling. She asserts that her videos, especially those that openly discuss trans lives, create alignment between cis and trans communities by offering a transparent view into transgender realities. Her digital work, she states, is "part of a larger movement... a struggle for survival and dignity."

For her, the act of creating content is an act of survival. Every vlog, every reel is not just a post but a digital archive, a testament to trans resilience. However, this visibility also invites backlash. When her comment sections are closed to avoid abuse, detractors create reaction videos or send anonymous messages. Though not directly, there are rules like the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020 promise cyber safety but rarely enforce it in action. She sees this not just as a failure of law but of societal will. "Everything is a gimmick," she remarks, unless the root causes of stigma are addressed.

Despite these challenges, her resilience lies in her refusal to be silenced. When asked what advice she would give young trans women entering digital spaces, she offered: "Boost your self-confidence, be bold, and focus on content quality. Build your individuality. Create transparent and positive content that respects all." Her motto is to resist through persistence. Even in the face of Kerala's heavily masculinized digital culture and discriminatory undercurrents, she continues to upload, aware that her work contributes to a collective history.

From a standpoint perspective, her voice emerges not from the margins, but from an epistemic centre, that is, her lived experience becomes the ground for producing valid, situated knowledge. Her digital labor reclaims subjectivity, and her digital community resists the structures that deny individualized identity to trans persons. Her activism centres on everyday survival, narrative control, and digital community rather than grand political statements, making her page both her livelihood and a lifeline for other struggling transgender individuals.

Social Media Platforms as Tools of Income and Identity

For transgender women content creators in Kerala, digital platforms have become more than just tools for self-expression; they are spaces of economic opportunity, identity assertion, and visibility. While often navigating hostile environments both online and offline, these women use platforms like YouTube and Instagram to share stories, document their lives, and promote content that reflects their diverse interests.

Contrary to popular assumptions that digital presence is primarily motivated by money and fame, they do not pursue visibility solely for financial gain or celebrity status. All of the trans women interviewed for this study have monetized their YouTube accounts, and surprisingly, are not full-time content creators. Their engagement with digital platforms is therefore not driven by greed or desperation but by a deeper sense of purpose and agency.

Interestingly, brand promotions and collaborations are not accepted indiscriminately. Participants revealed that they are selective about the partnerships they engage in, often turning down offers that do not align with their values or content. This selective participation underscores their commitment to authenticity and control over their self-representation. They are not passive recipients of digital attention but active curators of their image and voice.

More importantly, choosing to reveal their transgender identity online is a deliberate act of self-affirmation and subjectivity. It is a way of taking control of the narrative, of refusing to be hidden or defined by others. Their presence on these platforms is not just for visibility but for asserting their identity on their own terms. As one participant said, “I don’t care about people calling me names. They will talk anyway.” This resilience reflects a conscious detachment from societal stigma, an understanding that judgment is inevitable, but silence is not an option. As one of the trans woman content creators said during the interview:



“Initially, reading the bullying and slut-shaming comments was heart-wrenching. It affected me deeply, especially because I was trying to stay in everyone’s good books. But I realized that this was a trap. In the beginning, every negative comment would make me feel sad, and I even questioned myself—but that’s not who I am. Eventually, I understood something important: whether I live a so-called ‘good’ life or not, people will still judge and comment. So now, I just do what feels right to me and what makes me happy. These days, even the worst comments don’t affect me. In fact, I often read them out loud with my friends, and we just laugh, it’s become a joke”.

Still, the emotional toll of visibility cannot be dismissed. One content creator shared how she had once gone into depression just from reading the hateful comments under her videos. Yet she added, “I bounce back, because there is no other way to live.” This act of bouncing back is itself a form of resistance. It shows how digital spaces, even when hostile, can be repurposed into arenas of survival and strength.

These creators are not merely documenting moments for personal gain or popularity. They are consciously recording their lives as a form of digital history. Their videos and posts serve as representational archives of everyday trans existence in Kerala – ordinary yet radical in their refusal to be erased. Through this work, they create new models of livelihood and selfhood, grounded in visibility, resilience, and pride.

Community Building and Activism as Resistance and Resilience

Beyond personal identity and income, digital platforms serve as crucial sites for community-building among transgender women in Kerala. These platforms, particularly Instagram and YouTube, enable them to connect with one another, share resources, and foster a sense of solidarity that is often absent in offline spaces. In a social environment where transgender individuals frequently experience alienation, discrimination, and marginalization, these digital communities offer vital spaces for belonging and collective healing.

Many interviewees spoke of how they found not just followers but chosen families online. Through their posts and interactions, they are able to affirm one another, offer mental health support, and collaborate on awareness campaigns that address issues like gender justice, education, and health. These networks of support help them navigate both online and offline hostility and offer a buffer against loneliness, depression, and exclusion.

Their activism is not always overt or framed within formal political discourse. Instead, it emerges through everyday acts of storytelling, content sharing, responding to hate comments with grace, and refusing to be silenced. Their activism is not isolated; it is part of a long, ongoing movement for survival, dignity, and self-determination by the entire community. For instance, several participants described how their stories inspired other young trans individuals to come out or seek support. One creator mentioned receiving private messages from viewers thanking her for giving them the courage to express their gender identity. This kind of emotional impact, while difficult to quantify, is central to the way trans women engage in activism online, subtly yet powerfully transforming lives.

Moreover, digital platforms have enabled collaborative efforts between creators. Some organize online fundraising campaigns for members of their community, while others produce content in partnership with queer rights groups or mental health professionals. These collaborations reflect a shift from isolated digital presence to intentional community activism. They are not merely using the internet for visibility; they are using it as an infrastructure of care and collective resistance.

This research also found that despite the deep sense of community, there is an acute awareness of surveillance, censorship, and algorithmic neglect. Still, trans women continue to build digital safe spaces that defy these limitations. They engage with audiences not just for recognition, but for education and transformation. They participate in hashtag movements, repost each other's work, and comment supportively on videos and reels—acts that may seem small but, when seen together, form the fabric of a resilient digital collective. These practices highlight how community-building online is inherently a political act for trans women. In the society that often denies them legitimacy, their digital networks become sites of resistance. Through shared content, emotional solidarity, and mutual aid, they collectively challenge the norms that render them invisible or deviant. In essence, their digital activism and community-building efforts reflect a refusal to be defined by marginality. They are constructing new paradigms of visibility and voice, demonstrating that even in the face of precarity and platform bias, resistance is not only possible, it is already thriving.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the complex digital lives of transgender women content creators in Kerala, a population that navigates, performs, and negotiates identity, visibility, and survival within the mediated, algorithmic, and often hostile terrain of social media. At its heart, the study aimed to understand how platforms like YouTube and Instagram are not just entertainment or networking spaces, but critical terrains for agency, income generation, community formation, and digital resistance for select trans women in Kerala's socio-cultural context.

Despite an ambitious sampling plan to engage with ten trans women digital creators, one of the limitations of this study was that only five participants agreed to be interviewed. While this number may seem modest in scale, each of these five voices offered rich, powerful, and nuanced insights into the complex interplay between visibility, vulnerability, and digital agency. Their stories were not statistical data points but deeply lived narratives that defied generalization and called for individual recognition. Although limited in size, the sample revealed an intense qualitative depth that enabled the research to remain focused on the lived realities of digital precarity and resilience. The remaining five, despite initial contact, remained unresponsive due to reasons that underscore the very themes this study addresses: exhaustion from repeated telling of trauma, suspicion of institutional frameworks, and concern over being tokenized. As one interviewee explained, researchers ruthlessly ask for data, and there were times when she had to type her responses and send them to the concerned parties as if it were her work, adding that nowadays no one is actually willing to do this. This limitation itself is telling. It highlights the ethical fragility of researching marginalized populations in digital contexts, where the researcher's invitation to 'share' can be perceived as yet another request for emotional labor without guaranteed change. It also reflects the emotional and psychological toll that trans women face, not just in being visible on social media but in having to narrativize that visibility repeatedly for academic, policy, or journalistic ends. Silence, in this sense, becomes a form of resistance. It is a refusal to participate in frameworks that might not fully grasp or safeguard their complexities. Acknowledging this limitation is not simply a matter of academic honesty but a recognition of the layered burdens of representation and the ethical responsibility that rests on research engagements with vulnerable communities.

Yet, for those who did choose to speak, their accounts revealed a landscape of extraordinary emotional strength, social awareness, and strategic digital engagement. Each story was distinct, shaped by differing degrees of digital visibility, content style, personal history, and audience interaction. But what united them all was a clear, unwavering thread of resilience, the determination not just to survive, but to live, and to live visibly. Their resilience was not framed in romanticized notions of 'overcoming adversity' but in quiet, radical acts of persistence: filming another vlog after a hate comment, continuing to post despite shadowbanning, speaking about identity even when it invited online abuse, and finding community in a space designed to isolate through algorithms.

What emerged is the realization that there is no singular trans experience in Kerala's digital culture. Everyone's struggle is unique, intertwined with religion, caste, class, education, urban-rural divides, and the specific digital spaces they inhabit. Some found supportive audiences and brand collaborations, others battled constant trolling and content takedowns. Some used content creation as an extension of their activism, while others approached it as a form of livelihood, storytelling, or even therapy. These distinctions matter because they trouble any monolithic representation of trans women as either victims or symbols of triumph. Instead, what this research attempts to foreground is a plurality of digital lives, each negotiating their own rhythm between risk and resistance.

In theorising their experiences, the use of standpoint theory helped surface how knowledge is constructed differently when seen from the margins. The participants were not passive subjects but epistemic agents – producing knowledge about their own existence through their digital labor, crafting counter-narratives through their reels and vlogs, and resisting societal erasure through the very act of self-representation. From their margins, they not only voiced critiques of social and digital exclusion but also offered blueprints for inclusive community-building, identity formation, and self-affirmation that institutional policies have yet to imagine. Their stories, rooted in pain and power, spoke louder than any algorithm or policy document.

At the same time, this research has revealed the dangerous paradoxes of digital visibility for trans women. On one hand, the digital space functions as a stage for autonomy, creativity, and economic survival. On the other hand, it amplifies surveillance, misgendering, fetishization, and algorithmic policing. The violence is both symbolic and material, especially in the form of mental health degradation, legal neglect, and financial instability. While policies such as Kerala's Transgender Policy and national cyber laws promise inclusion and safety, the lived experience of digitality for these women points to a vast chasm between policy rhetoric and platform reality.

In this context, the question arises: what does resilience mean when precarity is the default? This study argues that digital resilience is not a static trait but a dynamic, embodied strategy. It is the ability to continue showing up despite erasure, to find community in the cracks of algorithmic neglect, and to transform hate comments into opportunities for dialogue, laughter, or defiance. It is the choice to be seen, again and again, knowing the risks, but choosing life over silence.

The participants' digital presence, though small in number, is significant in impact. Their pages, videos, reels, and shorts are not just timelines but testimonies; not just content but archives of resistance. They build digital kinship networks where none existed, educate viewers who otherwise have no access to trans lives, and generate income through dignity rather than dependence. Even when faced with setbacks, from mental health dips to shadowbanning, they persist. Their digital labor is, in fact, an activism of survival: a quiet, consistent, and often unpaid contribution to creating a more equitable online world.

In closing, this study's limited sample does not dilute its contribution; rather, it amplifies the need for more ethical, participant-centred, and intersectional research on digital visibility of transgender people, especially in regional contexts. Future studies could expand to include more participants across different linguistic and regional landscapes of India, draw comparative studies between cis and trans content creators, and examine long-term patterns of platform governance and inclusion. What this project ultimately offers is not a definitive conclusion but a call to listen, deeply, respectfully, and continuously, to the digital stories being told from the margins. It is a call to policymakers to not confuse access with inclusion, to educators to rethink digital literacy through queer pedagogies, and to researchers to treat silence not as a gap but as a political voice.

Above all, it is a call to see trans women digital content creators in Kerala not as anomalies, spectacles, or footnotes in digital history, but as authors of their own narratives: resilient, radiant, and here to live.

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