Digital Gender Performatives: A Cross-Platform Study of Language on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp

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Abstract: The present study explores how gender identity is linguistically constructed across Meta's integrated Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp ecosystem. Drawing on the theory of Judith Butler's gender performativity and the sociolinguistics of computer-mediated communication, this research will be based on a qualitative, multi-case study methodology. By means of digital ethnography, content analysis, and semi-structured interviews, it examines how platform affordances shape gendered linguistic performances. The emergent taxonomy is rather clear: Facebook's context collapse fosters generalized, collaboratively-policed scripts; Instagram's visual-centricity promotes aesthetic, citational performances with hashtags and emojis; and WhatsApp's privacy enables intimate, dialogic identity negotiation by means of code-switching and conversational pragmatics. This study concludes that digital gender is not a monolithic expression but a fluid, context-dependent accomplishment. Thus, the platform itself acts as a co-author in an active manner to shape the "stylized repetition of acts" that constitute gender online, commanding a platform-sensitive approach toward understanding identity in the digital age.

Keywords: *Gender Performativity, Computer-Mediated Communication, Platform Affordances, Cross-Platform Analysis, Digital Identity*

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Introduction

Background of the Study

The early 21st century has been irrevocably stamped by the rapid emergence of social media, platforms that have unalterably reconstructed the fabric of human relation, community organization, and identity enactment. The digital revolution has shifted social life to a new location, a location that danah boyd (2014) aptly describes as "networked publics"-spaces in which the topology of the network (its affordances and limits) effectively sets the public that may gather there (boyd, 2014). These virtual environments are not merely conduits for information but are ever-changing, co-constructed worlds with their own specific architectures, social norms, and communicative possibilities that actively shape the ways in which individuals represent themselves to the world and interpret others' identities. The terms of friendship, community, and selfhood itself are being renegotiated in such coded spaces, where engagement is steady, reproducible, scalable, and searchable, imbuing a new and often complex context for identity management.

In this enormous digital network, Meta Platforms Inc. has emerged as a paradigmatic, hegemonic force. Its strategic evolution from a single college social networking site to a conglomerate with a constellation of applications-most famously Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp-is a concerted attempt to encompass much of online sociality (Thomas, 2022). This portfolio strategy creates an interlinked web that caters to an enormously wide variety of communicative needs. As noted by Owuor and Hochmair (2020), different social media applications have different primary purposes, varying from information exchange to visual narrative to person-to-person messaging (Owuor, 2020). Meta's empire captures this whole range: Facebook tends to be used as a site for keeping in touch with larger, "context-collapsed" social networks that include family, friends, and acquaintances all mixed together; Instagram favors visual self-presentation and aesthetic curation for a more selectively built audience; and WhatsApp is used for tight, private, and frequently encrypted one-to-one or small-group communication. This integrated yet diverse context makes Meta the ideal case to examine the ways in which the same user comes to terms with and performs identity on various digital platforms, each with its own rules and expectations. Along with this technological reboot, academic understanding around gender has undergone a fundamental and parallel shift.

The late 20th century witnessed an aggressive departure from essentialist thinking that locates gender as a simple, binary, biological fact. Instead, newer scholarship, much influenced by feminist and queer theory, has explained gender as merely a variable social construction, an infinitely repeated, performed, and negotiated identity through social engagement. The efforts of prominent philosopher Judith Butler have been at the vanguard in effecting such a paradigm shift. Butler's (1988; 1999) influential theory of performativity of gender postulates that gender is not a fixed self or stable attribute but a doing-a "stylized repetition of

acts" both bodily and discursive, which take on the appearance of a natural, essential substance over time (Butler J. , 1988; Butler J. , 1990).

The performative approach is especially effective and insightful in the social media context. If gender is performed, then social media platforms, with their tools of controlled self-presentation, become hyper-visible sites for these performative acts. Social media identity is intentionally and self-reflexively enacted by a variety of choices: the terms of a status post, the filter on a selfie, the hashtags on a post, and the emojis on a comment (Flores, A. M. M., & Antunes, E., 2023; Gross, 2023). The virtual is, therefore, not merely an imitation of existing gender identity but also a central site for its ongoing construction and confirmation.

The convergence of these two profounds phenomena-the expansion of social media as a primary space for social living and the theoretical articulation of gender as performative-comprises the key nexus of this research. By this time, language has become the underlying and most subtle vehicle by which digital gender performance is formulated and comprehended. As one of the pillars of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), social media language exists as a rich, complicated, and polycodeic system. It encompasses not only formal written language but also a broad array of paralinguistic and semiotic features, including the conscious use of emojis to convey emotion and tone, hashtags to identify identity, categorization, and activism, and code-switching to accommodate different cultural or social environments on the platform (Daulay, S. H., Nasution, A. H., Ningsih, F. R., Berutu, H., Irham, N. R., & Mahmudah, R., 2024; Herring, 1996). This expanded linguistic scope provides the speaker a sophisticated repertoire for identity building. Gender and language is an ancient concern of sociolinguistic research. Early foundational work by scholars like Tannen (1994) and others, as described in the background by Endo and Abe (2022), suggested strict correspondences between language practices and gendered socialization, inclined to demarcate communication styles as discrete (Tannen, 1994; Endo, O., & Abe, H., 2022).

Concurrently, huge computational research under the information and communication technologies age has supported and supplemented these results, demonstrating that age, gender, and personality indicators are indeed highly signaled in social media language using open-vocabulary techniques to transcend preconceived categories (Schwartz, H. A., Eichstaedt, J. C., Kern, M. L., Dziurzynski, L., Ramones, S. M., ... & Ungar, L. H., 2013). Nevertheless, a fundamental disconnect persists. Much of this effort has addressed "social media" as a monolith or separately with individual sites. The platform-specific affordances specific to Meta's applications suggest that they work as technologically mediated, autonomous stages, each necessitating and facilitating different aspects of the gender performance.

The visually driven, aesthetically motivated form of Instagram, in which images are grounded and made sense of through linguistic labels and tags (Madhura, K., & Panakaje, N., 2022; Tungga, 2018), facilitates a performed self that is highly visually literate and edited. On the other hand, Facebook's context-collapsed, community-oriented, and typically text-density-focused environment may prompt other linguistic responses to dealing with heterogeneous audiences (Simões, R. B., Amaral, I., Flores, A. M., & Antunes, E., 2023). In between, however, the private, ephemeral, and synchronous condition of WhatsApp chats allows for the more intimate, dialogical, and less self-reflexively performative linguistic style, yet nonetheless a relevant location of "doing gender" in daily life. It is this nuanced, relative analysis that the present research embarks on.

By positioning itself at the intersection of platform studies, sociolinguistics, and gender studies, this study intends to clarify how the gender identity of the users is linguistically constructed, performed, and negotiated through the distinct but interconnected stages of the Meta universe. It not only asks whether gender is being performed on the internet, but also how precisely the specific architectural and social constraints of Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp shape the very form, content, and reception of these performances, and therefore to a deeper understanding of identity in the digital age.

Problem Statement

While significant work has been done on gender and language (Hall, Borba, & Hiramoto, 2021; Endo & Abe, 2022), and further work begins to study communication on particular social media platforms such as TikTok (Shutsko, 2020) or Quora (Dewi et al., 2024), the widespread gap remains in comparative sociolinguistic analysis of gender performance under the integrated system of a single corporate entity (Hall, K., Borba, R., & Hiramoto, M., 2021; Endo, O., & Abe, H., 2022; Shutsko, 2020). Meta's apps are not silos; they are often used in tandem by users to move through different parts of their identity to different audiences (boyd, 2014; Francisco, 2024). But scholarship has addressed these sites separately. For instance, we understand that language use varies by gender (Aydın, 2023; Schwartz et al., 2013), and we understand that platform design influences user behavior (Owuor, 2020; Schwartz, H. A., Eichstaedt, J. C., Kern, M. L., Dziurzynski, L., Ramones, S. M., ... & Ungar, L. H., 2013; Aydın, 2023). But there is little directed research that questions: How does the same individual or demographic group enact gender differently on the semi-public, text-rich Facebook, the visual-narrative Facebook-owned Instagram, and the private, conversational WhatsApp space? Scholars like Flores and Antunes' (2023) and Simões et al.'s (2023) have begun this work in the Portuguese context, identifying "scripted gender practices," yet their findings are in need of replication and extension in other linguistic and cultural contexts.

Moreover, the ethical implications of collecting and analyzing this user-generated data, particularly from close environments, represent a compound problem requiring a solution. Therefore, the primary problem that this thesis seeks to address is the need for a systematic, comparative, and platform-sensitive analysis of how gender identities are linguistically built up across Meta's key applications. It seeks to move beyond broad brushstrokes to uncover the subtle processes by which platform affordances such as ephemerality (Stories), permanence (posts), privacy (chats), and polycodeicity (creolized text and image) (Anisimova, 2003; Ryabova, M. E., & Egorova, L. A., 2018) beget and are begotten by gendered linguistic performances.

Research Objectives

Guided by the overarching goal of analyzing how language constructs gender in Meta sites, this study formulates the following primary research questions:

- To list and categorize the distinctive linguistic features-like hashtags, emojis, and code-switching-used in the construction of gender in Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp.

- To analyze how platform-specific affordances such as context collapse, visual-centricity, and privacy influence the construction and variation of these gendered performances of language.
- To examine how closely the language strategies of users on these websites align with or subvert conventional gender norms and stereotypes.

Methodology

This study took a qualitative, multi-case study approach under an interpretivist paradigm to investigate the linguistic performance of gender on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. An interpretivist paradigm was selected to investigate the construction of gender through performative acts in online spaces, where priority was given to subjective meaning-making over generalizable trends. Each platform was treated as an individual case to enable comparative analysis of the ways in which their respective affordances shaped gendered linguistic behavior. Data were collected through a multi-method approach of digital ethnography, content analysis, and semi-structured interviews. A purposively sampled dataset of 30 publicly available posts (10 per platform) and their comment threads was collected, representing a variety of user-presented genders and types of posts. For WhatsApp-in light of its private nature-semi-structured interviews with 10 participants (18-30 years old) were conducted, and participants shared anonymized screenshots of group chats. Interviews explored participants' metalinguistic awareness and platform-specific communication strategies. Analysis of the data followed Braun and Clarke's model of thematic analysis. The entire text data were coded using NVivo software in a codebook derived from theoretical concepts (e.g., citationality, affordance-driven performance) and emergent linguistic patterns (e.g., emoji use, code-switching, hashtagging). The analysis progressed from initial coding through theme identification to a final cross-platform synthesis of gendered linguistic performances. Ethical considerations were obtaining informed consent, anonymizing all materials, and keeping data on encrypted drives. Special care was taken with private WhatsApp data, where redaction of identifiers was done by participants before submission. This approach was aligned with ethical guidelines for digital research while enabling close examination of gender performativity across platforms.

Literature Review

Inventing the Digital Performance of Gender

It is assumed in this study that social networking sites are not passive reflections of already pre-existent gender identities, but active spaces for their active and continuous production. The conception of gender as an essential nature expressed in terms has been effectively challenged by decades of sociolinguistic scholarship, which has shifted towards a model of gender as social achievement (Hall, K., Borba, R., & Hiramoto, M., 2021). This theoretical evolution finds its most profound expression in the internet context, where the very organization of interaction necessitates controlled self-presentation.

Empirical research throughout the past decade has come together to firmly establish that gender not only is reflected but performatively enacted online, a process intentionally strategic in its enactment and empirically traceable in its textual product. The performative nature of online gender is perhaps best represented through the "scripted gender practices," as formulated by Flores

and Antunes (2023) and Simões et al. (2023). Their research with youths in Portugal explains that users are not simply a gender online; rather, they actively and typically intentionally perform gender by adhering to and negotiating standard cultural scripts (Flores, A. M. M., & Antunes, E., 2023; Simões, R. B., Amaral, I., Flores, A. M., & Antunes, E., 2023).

Scripts are shaped by the specific site's technological affordances and normative cultures. For instance, a person may enact a script of aspirational femininity on Instagram, using aesthetic labour and highly constructed images, and a script of peer-based, informal masculinity in a digital WhatsApp chat. This labour brings a critical qualitative richness, situating individuals as agentive actors who produce and negotiate gendered demands strategically across their online spaces.

boyd (2014) book on networked publics provides this structural context to such scripts, implying that digital content's persistence, replicability, and searchability render such performances citation-perpetually in the making and therefore press one more intensely to deploy one's gendered self-presentation tactfully (boyd, 2014). This qualitative evidence of strategic performance is complemented forcefully by big data, quantitative research. The seminal study by Schwartz et al. (2013) used an open-vocabulary method to examine a large corpus of Facebook text, definitively proving that gender is one of the strongest and most observable signals in social media messaging (Schwartz, H. A., Eichstaedt, J. C., Kern, M. L., Dziurzynski, L., Ramones, S. M., ... & Ungar, L. H., 2013). Their findings reach beyond theoretical hypothesis to provide empirical proof, revealing discrete language patterns particular to male and female participants, everything from the use of emotive words and affectionate emojis to statements of objective fact and obscenity. But trouble surfaces in the explanation of these macro-level patterns. Whereas Schwartz et al. demonstrate these differences to exist on a population level, their approach is unable to reveal the underlying motives.

This is where the logic of scholars like Flores & Antunes (2023) and Gross (2023) enter. One could argue that Schwartz et al.'s identified trends are the aggregated, data trace of the very "scripted practices" qualitative researchers describe (Flores, A. M. M., & Antunes, E., 2023; Gross, 2023). These linguistic variations are not the origin of gender but the result of millions of individuals consistently performing gendered performance on shared social scripts, a practice that Butler (1988) would identify as the citational function of performativity (Butler J. , 1988).

More depth to this analysis is provided by studies that examine these performances on single platforms and affirm the fluidity and contextuality of digital gender. Dewi et al. (2024) found, in their analysis of Quora, that gender-based linguistic patterns on the knowledge-sharing platform were distinct from those within more socially active networks, highlighting that the "stage" shapes the "performance" (Dewi, T. C., Widyawati, W., Rochmahwati, P., & Khasanah, N., 2024). Shutsko (2020) also illustrates the ways TikTok's short-video format facilitates highly embodied and choreographic performances of and for gender, which are distinct from text-based ones conventionally analyzed in such sites as early forums or Facebook (Shutsko, 2020). This site-specificity is then further complicated by context collapse, as described by boyd (2014), in which the flattening of diverse audiences on a site like Facebook necessitates a gender performance that will be more generalized or strategically evasive so as to remain interpretable across social spaces (boyd, 2014). The argument of performance is

further supported by work on the linguistic micro-tools being employed in such processing. Daulay et al. (2024) in fact relate the employment of code-switching on TikTok and Instagram to identity negotiation directly, illustrating how users seamlessly switch their language to accommodate changing gendered and cultural contexts within the same site (Daulay, S. H., Nasution, A. H., Ningsih, F. R., Berutu, H., Irham, N. R., & Mahmudah, R., 2024). This is in accordance with the evidence reported by Aydın (2023), who documented systematic fluctuation in communication style (Aydın, 2023).

Moreover, the very performance is often polycodeic. The work of Ryabova & Egorova (2018) and Tungga (2018) demonstrates that on visually-driven platforms like Instagram, gender is performed through the creolized textual compound of image, filter, caption, and hashtag (Tungga, 2018; Ryabova, M. E., & Egorova, L. A., 2018). The performance is not located in the text itself but in the integrated interaction of differing systems of meaning, such that one post is a coherent, compound gendered utterance.

Finally, with all said, the scholarly consensus unequivocally demonstrates social media gender as a digital performance. This is testified to by users' strategic, scripted actions (Flores & Antunes, 2023; Simões et al., 2023), supported by scale-suitable linguistic inclinations (Schwartz et al., 2013), and enacted through platform-specific adjustments (Dewi et al., 2024; Shutsko, 2020) and advanced linguistic tools (Daulay, S. H., Nasution, A. H., Ningsih, F. R., Berutu, H., Irham, N. R., & Mahmudah, R., 2024; Dewi, T. C., Widyawati, W., Rochmahwati, P., & Khasanah, N., 2024; Simões, R. B., Amaral, I., Flores, A. M., & Antunes, E., 2023; Flores, A. M. M., & Antunes, E., 2023). The argument has now advanced to the point of considering whether gender is being performed on the internet to the point of considering how such performances are constructed. The present study builds on this firm foundation by proposing a controlled comparative analysis of the performances through the distinct yet interconnected stages of the Meta network, asking not if they occur, but how they differ linguistically across WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook.

Platform Affordances as Discrete Phases

Having established that gender is performed online, it is necessary to map the specific architectures which script these performances. One of the main flaws of earlier gender and online communication studies was the homogenization of "social media" as one entity. Scholarship has increasingly unequivocally shifted towards a platform-specific approach, recognizing that the unique technological affordances of each app signify separate stages that necessitate and make possible differential scripts of gender performance. Borrowing from Owuor & Hochmair's (2020) compelling arguments, different social media apps are coded with single primary goals, which also shape user behavior, community formation, and even the nature of content posted (Owuor, 2020).

This research decidedly takes this position, rationalizing distinguishing Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp as different research contexts on the basis of exploration of scholarly agreement on how their specific affordances-visibility, permanence, and social structure-are creating different atmospheres for gendered self-presentation. Facebook is the exemplary "networked public," a phrase made lucid by boyd (2014) to describe publics that are simultaneously shaped both by the networked technology and by their users (boyd, 2014). The signature affordance of the platform in this instance is context

collapse. This phenomenon, where different social circles of one's life-family, friends, workmates, and acquaintances-are collapsed into a single monolithic audience-offers a unique challenge to gender performance.

The study of Simões et al. (2023) on "scripted gender practices" concludes that such a breakdown requires users to balance on a performative tightrope on which they need to present an intelligible and acceptable gender in terms of different social worlds. The linguistic performance on Facebook here is likely to be aimed at the generalised, the guarded, and the strategically ambiguous. This is compounded by the platform's affordances of searchability and persistence (boyd, 2014), where a gendered performance now exists as a permanent, citable text, which encourages a more deliberated and norm-governed self-presentation (Simões, R. B., Amaral, I., Flores, A. M., & Antunes, E., 2023; boyd, 2014).

The corporate metamorphosis of Facebook to Meta, as described by Thomas, Laiby, & Bhat (2022), underscores its initial nature as a scale-level, identity-verified social graph and therefore the first order space for presenting a "front stage" self to a large, context-collapsed audience (Thomas, 2022). Relative to Facebook's broad social graph, Instagram's stage is defined by visualism and aestheticized display. While the performance of Facebook is generally accessed through text and links, the performance of gender on Instagram is polycodeic by nature, constructed through the inseparable synergy of image, filter, caption, and hashtag. Tungga (2018) deconstruction of "Instagramability" reveals how the platform's design provides visual balance and aesthetic labour, and how these directly inform the types of gender performances that become successful (Tungga, 2018).

Similarly, Madhura & Panakaje (2022), in their case study of Meta, highlight the power of Instagram as a promotional instrument driven by visual appeal, extending to promotion of the self (Madhura, K., & Panakaje, N., 2022). Such a culture promotes highly performative genderings that are stylized, body-conscious, and responsive to idealized ways of living. The ephemerality affordance through "Stories" subsequently adds a temporal depth that allows cruder, more intimate performances that equally vanish, generating a tension of static aesthetic posts and fleeting informal updates. This aligns with the work of Flores & Antunes (2023), who found that young adults meticulously curate their Instagram profiles as aesthetic art pieces, with gender performed through a highly managed visual narrative (Flores, A. M. M., & Antunes, E., 2023).

It is within this visual space that the very linguistic means themselves are constructed; according to Ryabova & Egorova (2018), that a creolized language such as that of an Instagram post requires an analytic approach that engages the visual and the linguistic as part of a single semiotic whole in forming identity (Ryabova, M. E., & Egorova, L. A., 2018). This is precisely the opposite of what is offered by WhatsApp. Whereas Facebook is the public square and Instagram is the curated museum of art, WhatsApp is the private living room. Its defining affordances are encryption, synchronicity, and above all, privacy, generating an atmosphere of intimate, trusted speech.

The research of Flores & Antunes (2023) and Simões *et al.* (2023) again and again positions WhatsApp as the platform for "back stage" performance where gender is enacted not in front of a large audience but in the comfort of intimate, often homogeneous groups (Flores, A. M. M., & Antunes, E., 2023; Simões, R. B., Amaral, I., Flores, A. M., & Antunes, E., 2023). Linguistic performance here

is shifted from the observable and declarative to the pragmatic and interactive. It is achieved in the continuous turn-taking of group talk, relational work between emojis and GIFs, voice note immediacy, and artful code-switching practice (Daulay et al., 2024) in an intimate group. The ephemerality, although not regulated by the platform as it is with Stories, is a social convention in most instances, with the talk flowing and dissolving, allowing for a less constrained and more impromptu gender performance (Daulay, S. H., Nasution, A. H., Ningsih, F. R., Berutu, H., Irham, N. R., & Mahmudah, R., 2024). This site's purpose is also amplified by the greater social media context; studies of other direct messaging sites or substitutes like the newly purchased Twitter, as referenced in Francisco's (2024) writing, reinforce the overall distinction between open public spaces and personal messaging spaces (Francisco, 2024).

As this research synthesis, a clear taxonomy ensues. boyd's (2014) theory of context collapse and networked publics lays the overall groundwork for understanding Facebook's difficult phase (boyd, 2014). The very definition by Tungga (2018) and Madhura & Panakaje (2022) of Instagram's aesthetic and visual boundaries of performative space and the consistent qualitative findings by researchers like Flores & Antunes (2023) supply cutting definitions of WhatsApp's intimate, private space (Tungga, 2018; Madhura, K., & Panakaje, N., 2022). Therefore, putting the three Meta platforms into separate research environments is not only justified but is both empirically and theoretically necessary. Each site's unique constellation of affordances determines a particular range of possibilities and constraints for the "stylized repetition of acts" composing gender, so comparative cross-platform analysis is the most suitable approach for identifying the fragmented and complex character of digital gender performativity.

The Linguistic Toolkit for Analysis: Deconstructing the Grammar of Digital Gender Performance

The consciousness that gender is performed on autonomous digital stages requires a precise analytical tool-a deconstruction toolkit for the very content of the performances. Moving away from macro-level consideration of gendered patterns involves being sensitive to the specific linguistic and semiotic characteristics that constitute the micro-practices of online identity construction. The scholarly discussion has turned toward fewer questions of whether or not gender is readable from online discourse and more questions regarding how gender gets embodied through a modern, inclusive grammar of hashtags, emojis, code-switching, and text-image fusion. This research places itself within this rich tradition, deserving of its critical attention through reference to a body of work approaching these qualities not as embellishment or ornament, but as necessary, semiotic units of gendered meaning. The broader linguistic repertoire of social media, the proximal wake of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) affordances, has itself been of concern to scholars since the very discipline was born.

Early researchers like Herring (1996) established that the absence of non-verbal sign in computer-mediated text would lead to the invention of innovative paralinguistic substitutes (Herring, 1996). This early insight turned out to be a prophecy, evolving into the complex series of emojis and ideograms now in use. Schwartz et al. (2013) then gave the big-data, empirical evidence for this, demonstrating that such features are not randomly allocated but follow in predictable patterns linked with gender (Schwartz, H. A.,

Eichstaedt, J. C., Kern, M. L., Dziurzynski, L., Ramones, S. M., ... & Ungar, L. H., 2013). However, while Aydın's (2023) "Examining gender differences in social media language" gives evidence of the existence of these overall patterns, it remains at the level of correlation (Aydın, 2023).

This work seeks to build on that by employing a finer-grained, context-sensitive framework drawing from research focused on the pragmatic deployment of such features in performative behaviors. It is here that the issue of specific linguistic tools becomes utterly critical. Code-switching, for instance, has been transformed in the social media era. Daulay et al. (2024) present a significant current argument, which is that code-switching in social media like Instagram and TikTok is a performative identity negotiation (Daulay, S. H., Nasution, A. H., Ningsih, F. R., Berutu, H., Irham, N. R., & Mahmudah, R., 2024). This argument is forcefully substantiated by a recent sociolinguistic examination of the online Nigerian forum Nairaland.

Adebayo et al. (2025) describe how "digital multilingualism" and strategic accommodation of language are central to performing multifaceted social, ethnic, and political identities in a given all-embracing pan-African digital community (Adebayo, 2025). Their findings indicate code-switching as more than a pragmatic convenience but as a necessary tool for negotiating and performing belonging in some online groups. This is exactly as described by the concept of "scripted gender practices" by Simões et al. (2023), whereby code-switching could be conceived as the linguistic performance of a script change in order to tap into gendered audience assumptions (Simões, R. B., Amaral, I., Flores, A. M., & Antunes, E., 2023).

Similarly, emojis have evolved beyond emotional markers to being a sophisticated system of tone, relational intimacy, and social membership. They are used in a way that, as proposed in Schwartz et al.'s (2013) big data and qualitatively explored by authors like Flores & Antunes (2023), is gendered, some emojis serving as entrenched markers of femininity or masculinity in digital discourse (Schwartz, H. A., Eichstaedt, J. C., Kern, M. L., Dziurzynski, L., Ramones, S. M., ... & Ungar, L. H., 2013; Flores, A. M. M., & Antunes, E., 2023). The most platform-shaping feature of modern CMC may be the hashtag. Both a metadata tag and a community-forming tool, the hashtag allows users to inscribe their personal content into broader, often highly gendered public discussions.

The use of tags like #girlboss, #boymom, or #mensmentalhealth is a performative speech act that publicly affirms the user's identification with a particular gendered ideology or group. This action is a clear instance of Butler's concept of citationality; the hashtag is a per-facto citation of a discursive public, invoking the normative force of the group in a way that amplifies the user's own gendered act. Tungga (2018) research into the "Instagramability" of Javanese quotations is the ideal example of this, illustrating how hashtags are an important component of making a piece of content discoverable within specific cultural and social niches, which are often highly gendered (Tungga, 2018). However, an ideally thorough gender performance analysis of visual media like Instagram cannot be founded on text analysis alone.

This research therefore incorporates the key concept of polycodeic or creolized texts as presented by Ryabova & Egorova (2018). They argue that the majority of modern digital communication is created in the merged collaboration of verbal text and the visual image and is a single, holistic semantic entity (Ryabova, M. E., &

Egorova, L. A., 2018). This is a significant advance from earlier CMC work which was text-based. On Instagram, for example, meaning of a post-and thus its gendered performance-is neither in the caption nor the photo in isolation, but in synergistic interplay between the two together. A photo and caption can reinforce, contradict, or ironically subvert one another, and the outcome is highly textured gendered meaning. This theoretical approach is supported by Anisimova (2003), whose study of cross-cultural communication on creolized texts provides a preliminary insight into how varying semiotic systems intersect to create meaning (Anisimova, 2003). Its reading thus is not an extraneous luxury but a methodological necessity for the proper recording of the entirety of gender performance on visually-driven sites. This multi-dimensional focus on the linguistic toolkit also allows investigation of a key tension in the literature: between conformity and subversion.

While macro-level research like Schwartz et al. (2013) and Aydın (2023) identify tendencies to support hegemonic gendered norms, other researchers hint at possibilities for resistance (Schwartz, H. A., Eichstaedt, J. C., Kern, M. L., Dziurzynski, L., Ramones, S. M., ... & Ungar, L. H., 2013; Aydın, 2023). The strategic, agentive deployment of linguistic properties set forth in Daulay et al. (2024) and Adebayo et al. (2025) and the polycodeic text's creative potential (Ryabova & Egorova, 2018) are precisely the means by which users are able to queer, play, or subvert gendered norms. The feedback cycle articulated by Gross (2023), where AI models learn from and amplify aforementioned human performances, still continues to emphasize the high stakes involved in this linguistic activity (Daulay, S. H., Nasution, A. H., Ningsih, F. R., Berutu, H., Irham, N. R., & Mahmudah, R., 2024; Adebayo, 2025; Ryabova, M. E., & Egorova, L. A., 2018; Gross, 2023).

In conclusion, the rationale behind investigating this specific set of linguistic features-hashtags, emojis, code-switching, and polycodeic texts-is well-warranted within the context of a sound and cross-cultural scholarly debate. This toolkit allows the study to bridge the gap between macro-correlations reported by computer studies (Aydın, 2023; Schwartz et al., 2013) and micro-practices of agentive identity work reported in qualitative studies in different contexts (Adebayo et al., 2025; Daulay et al., 2024; Flores & Antunes, 2023). Drawing on this rich theory, this study can move beyond the observation that gender is done to an account of the very precise linguistic and semiotic syntax of its doing through the diverse stages of the Meta ecosystem.

Theoretical Framework

Gender Performativity and the Digital Stage

The central goal of this research is to challenge the way gender is linguistically constructed across the ecology of Meta platforms. In order to give this question a strong conceptual basis, this paper establishes the theoretical context by which the virtual gender performance will be interpreted and analyzed. The frame's construction is virtually exclusively founded on the influential work of philosopher Judith Butler, whose theory of performativity of gender accounts for the most influential explanatory framework for explaining identity construction in the constructed setting of social media. The paper will explain the core principles of Butler's performativity, and distinguish it from performance, and will argue that there is no equal in accounting for the stylized performances of self-presentation that are characteristic of sites like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. It will also explain how the specific

affordances of these sites structure the performative process and how empirical evidence from earlier work affirms this theoretical approach. The debate about language and gender has a long and changing history in sociolinguistics, originally frequently being approached through models of difference in socialization (Tannen, 1994).

A paradigm shift did take place with the development of social constructionist thinking, which shifted the gaze from gender as a biological determinant of speech to gender as a social identity performed through speech and other symbolic systems (Hall, K., Borba, R., & Hiramoto, M., 2021). It is within this constructivist tradition that Judith Butler's work appears not as an afterthought, but as a revolutionary turn. In her now-canonical essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," Butler (1988) contends that gender is neither an essential identity nor a bounded category one possesses, but an identity that is provisionally constructed in time. It is an identity performed through a stylized repetition of acts (Butler J. , 1988). This repetition is not the manifestation of an inner core but is precisely what brings about the illusion of that core, which creates the appearance of a natural, pre-discursive gender identity. This conception was later radicalized in Gender Trouble (1999), when Butler argued that the very intelligibility of words like "man" and "woman" is a regulatory ideal, sustained by performative reiteration (Butler, J., 1999). This is not a process only of sense-making playfulness but one based in the power registers of society, making certain performances intelligible and "real" and others unintelligible or "unreal." An essential distinction must be made between performance and performativity, a nuance lost in careless usage.

A performance calls up an already existing actor who voluntarily chooses to enact a role. It calls for voluntarism and an underlying subject. Performativity, as interpreted in Butlerian terms, is far more pervasive. It's not a singular deed but a universal, necessary process. There is no "doer behind the deed," as famously argued, rather, the "doer" is created and brought into existence by the thought itself (Butler, J., 1999). For instance, a user uploading a carefully choreographed "gym selfie" onto Instagram is engaging in a deliberate performance of a healthy, regulated masculinity or femininity. They select the angle, the filter, and the caption. The performativity of gender is the wider, social process which makes that specific performance of fitness meaningful and culturally meaningful as "masculine "feminine" to start with. It is the discursive, historical repetition which gives muscularity masculinity or slimness femininity, which the user then cites and reifies by referring back to their post.

The power of performativity is that every act gets its power from repeating and affirming a chain of earlier acts, thereby affirming the very norms it appears to speak. This is significant for this dissertation, because it allows us to look at individual linguistic actions on social media (the performances) as instantiations of an overarching, constitutive social process (performativity). This analytic model is especially effective for looking at social media because such sites are, by definition, big, architected environments for the stylized repetition of acts.

The architecture itself of websites like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp requires and makes possible a repetitive process of self-presentation and identity curation. Every choice-from the wording of a status update and the filter used on a photo to the application of carefully selected hashtags like #girlboss or the palette of emojis used in a WhatsApp conversation-constitutes a performative act.

They are not neutral communications; they are instead citational practices that draw upon and reify a broad repertoire of gendered norms and aesthetics. What makes this powerful is what danah boyd (2014) identifies as the essential features of networked publics: persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability (boyd, 2014). The single post becomes a lasting point of reference to a gendered norm, a norm that can be replicated, scaled to an audience, and searched, thus extending the reach and power of the performative act beyond the original setting. The stage is not level, though.

The specific affordances of each Meta platform strongly influence the nature of the gendered performances created there. For instance, the image-oriented visually oriented nature of Instagram, as Tungga (2018) and Madhura and Panakaje (2022) argue, invites a performance that is closely tied to aesthetic labor and bodily presentation, these two being the first sites of gender norm enactment (Tungga, 2018; Madhura, K., & Panakaje, N., 2022). The visually curated and aspirational quality of the platform means that gender performativity on this site will likely be highly visual, exploiting the polycodeic blend of image and text to construct a coherent gendered utterance (Ryabova, M. E., & Egorova, L. A., 2018).

On the other hand, the Facebook context-collapse, where family, friends, and coworkers come together, requires a subtle negotiation of gendered expectations. The outcome is what Simões et al. (2023), in their study of Portuguese youth, term "scripted gender practices," in which speakers participate intentionally or not in scripts brokered by perceived audience expectations, gravitating toward more generalized or more highly managed linguistic performances (Simões, R. B., Amaral, I., Flores, A. M., & Antunes, E., 2023).

The private, ephemeral, and synchronous nature of WhatsApp, on the other hand, enables a second kind of performativity. Here, gender is institutionally organized through the pragmatics of close turn-taking in talk, close use of emoji and voice notes, and code-switching in closed groups (Daulay, S. H., Nasution, A. H., Ningsih, F. R., Berutu, H., Irham, N. R., & Mahmudah, R., 2024). This is the realm of what Butler would call the "mundine, daily performatives" which, through their compulsive repetition in private chat, fix gendered relational patterns. The validity of employing Butler's framework is firmly based on empirical evidence.

Schwartz et al.'s (2013) large-scale computational study provided unmistakable proof that gender is categorically legible from social media language. Their open-vocabulary approach detected distinctive linguistic clusters which include male and female users, from use of words to emotional tone. This can be understood as the large-scale, data-driven record of gendered performativity-the cumulative impact of millions of users quoting and reproducing gendered linguistic norms (Schwartz, H. A., Eichstaedt, J. C., Kern, M. L., Dziurzynski, L., Ramones, S. M., ... & Ungar, L. H., 2013).

Similarly, the qualitative verification provided by Flores and Antunes (2023) exists as well. The fact that young adults have various "uses, perspectives and affordances" on different sites depending on gender identity clearly illustrates the performative principle: users are not just "being" "male" or "female" online; they are self-reflexively "doing" gender by selectively selecting the appropriate stage and script for the desired performance (Flores, A. M. M., & Antunes, E., 2023). The modern utilization and meaning of these are also evident in work like that of Gross (2023), which explores how AI language models, having been trained on vast corpora of human-written text from these very spaces, can reproduce and extrapolate these performatives, oft-biased, gender citations (Gross, 2023). This shows the worldliness, circularity of performativity: gendered norms are performed on social media, are taken up and iterated by AI, are then shaping and constraining future human performance, creating a feedback loop that solidifies normative gender expressions.

Lastly, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity provides the needed philosophical foundation for this study. It moves the question away from naive listing of linguistic variation between pre-existing gender groups and instead places gender as a continuous, discursive achievement. By the imagining of social media as not a mirror reflecting a pre-existing identity but as a coercive and dynamic stage for the performative constitution of such an identity, this research can now ask more profound questions. The empirical precursors set out that this is not a philosophical exercise as such but an actual process with measurable linguistic repercussions. This model thus allows us to examine how the specific affordances of different Meta platforms guide the specific forms that these gendered citations take, from the visual pageant of Instagram to the social closeness of WhatsApp. The empirical instruments for documenting and analyzing these acts of language are outlined in the following chapter of methodology, but it is this theoretical framework that will explain their real relevance as constituents of gendered being in the digital age.

The Sociolinguistics of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

While Judith Butler's performativity theory of gender provides the general "what" of this study-gender performed constitutively-is it Sociolinguistics of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) that provides the important "how" and "where." Sociolinguistics of CMC provides the toolkit with which to deconstruct the quite specific machinery of digital performativity. The two theories are not only neighbours but complement one another: performativity explains the ontological makeup of gender construction, while the sociolinguistics of CMC chart the linguistic and technological materiality of that construction process in networked environments. Pioneering work by scholars like Herring (1996) demonstrated that CMC is no poor simulation of face-to-face interaction but a context with internal linguistic norms and coping strategies (Herring, 1996). Without the benefit of non-verbal communication, users establish dense paralinguistic systems to express tone, emotion, and identity. This accommodation is at the heart of gendered performativity online.

The linguistic features researched in CMC-such as the pragmatic use of emojis in order to achieve emotional nuance, hashtagging in order to mark affiliation and categorization, and strategic resort to code-switching between language registers (Daulay et al., 2024)-are exactly the concern of the "stylized acts" Butler is discussing. For instance, a user's choice to end a statement with a heart emoji ❤️ instead of a fist bump 👊 is a micro-performative act that calls upon and maintains gendered norms of emotional expression and friendship (Daulay, S. H., Nasution, A. H., Ningsih, F. R., Berutu, H., Irham, N. R., & Mahmudah, R., 2024). These are not trivial choices; they are the citational bricks and mortar upon which the building of a gendered digital self is built. Besides, the affordance

theory that underlies CMC research explicitly categorizes the way in which the architecture of the digital "stage" shapes the performance. boyd (2014) says that the design aspects of the networked publics like persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability structurally organize the social interaction (boyd, 2014). Properties such as these have powerful impacts on gender performativity.

The stability of a Facebook status makes an individual gender performance irretrievably citable, allowing it to be quoted as proof of a continuous identity. Replicability means a performance is imitable and transmissible, and hence amplified in its normative impact or distorted from its original intention. This architecture then influences the performative process in turn; the knowledge that an action is scalable and durable can lead to more norm-conforming and planned performances, as in the "scripted gender practices" on Facebook (Simões, R. B., Amaral, I., Flores, A. M., & Antunes, E., 2023). This scripting then gets modulated by the individual affordances of each platform within the Meta ecosystem, which are similar to various stages with various audiences and norms. The visually dense environment of Instagram, for example, encourages a performativity that is extremely polycodeic. In this case, gender is built with the creolized text of picture, filter, caption, and hashtag (Ryabova, M. E., & Egorova, L. A., 2018; Tungga, 2018).

The performance not only in the text but also in aesthetic curation, which makes Butler's argument more believable that performativity encompasses the bodily and the visual. Whereas the personal, transient, and simultaneous space of WhatsApp allows for another type of performativity. Gender in this case is performed through the rapid-fire, conversational pragmatics of turn-taking, the voice note familiarity, and the use of in-group slang (Daulay, S. H., Nasution, A. H., Ningsih, F. R., Berutu, H., Irham, N. R., & Mahmudah, R., 2024). This is consistent with the "context collapse" of Facebook, where a single performance must address a fragmented audience, demanding a more universal or strategically vague gender performance (boyd, 2014).

The sociolinguistics of CMC thus provides the necessary critical linkage to Butler's high-altitude theory and the particular, platform-based particularities of online life. Together, these two sets of theory need to be synthesized. Performativity of gender explains why endless curation of self on social media is neither superficial nor necessary to the creation of identity. It contends that there is no "true self" waiting to be uncovered behind the profile. Sociolinguistics of CMC, on the other hand, provides the methodology to research how it is done, by examining the linguistic and paralinguistic features of online discourse as data of performativity. It grounds Butler's philosophical claims on the analyzable contents of hashtags, emojis, and code-switched speech. They are synthesized in order to produce a firm lens for the analysis of linguistic gender construction on Meta's platforms and demonstrate that every post, comment, and chat is not merely a signification of gender, but a performative act whereby it comes into being.

Data Analysis

Facebook Data Analysis

Grace Joseph's Facebook Post

This analysis examines a Facebook post by Grace Joseph, a female user, and the extensive comment thread it generated. The post serves as a rich case study for understanding how gender is linguistically performed and negotiated within the specific affordances of the Facebook platform.

Polycodeic Gender Performance on a "Text-Dense" Platform

While Facebook is often considered more text-oriented than Instagram, this post demonstrates a **polycodeic performance** where the image and the caption work synergistically to construct a specific gendered identity (Ryabova & Egorova, 2018).

- **The Image:** The photo shows Grace Joseph holding an extremely large spoon, pointed towards her open mouth, with a playful and exaggerated expression. The image alone performs a gender identity that is **humorous, non-conforming to delicate feminine eating stereotypes, and asserts a robust appetite.**

- **The Caption:** The caption provides the context: *"Now i know y food no reach me for the wedding last week"*. This text anchors the image's meaning, framing the performance not as mere gluttony but as a justified, humorous complaint about a prior social slight (not getting food at a wedding).

The gendered meaning emerges from the interplay between the two. The text explains the image, and the image visually amplifies the emotion behind the text, transforming a simple complaint into a memorable, self-deprecating, and performative act. This aligns with the theory that on social media, gender is often constructed through a "creolized textual compound" (Ryabova & Egorova, 2018).

Linguistic Toolkit in Action: Emojis and Hashtags

The author's use of digital linguistic tools is minimal but strategic, fitting the conversational tone of Facebook.

- **Emojis for Emotional Nuance:** Grace Joseph uses a string of emojis: 😭😭😩❤️🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣. This sequence is a sophisticated paralinguistic cue (Herring, 1996). It starts with performative sadness and heartbreak (😩❤️) but quickly pivots to crying-laughter (🤣), signaling that her complaint is not serious but humorous and hyperbolic. This use of emojis to convey a complex, shifting emotional state is a key micro-tool in her gendered performance, balancing a "complaint" (often stereotypically feminine) with robust humor.

- **Strategic Hashtagging:** One commenter, **Mu Nk Izz**, uses a hashtag: #BlaQnationCares. This acts as a **citational practice** (Butler, 1988), publicly aligning the comment with a specific community or brand. While not used by the original poster, its presence in the thread shows how users employ hashtags to inscribe their contributions into broader, often gendered, public discourses (e.g., community support, social groups).

Audience Interpretation and the Reinforcement of Gendered Scripts

The comment thread is a prime example of how an audience on Facebook collaboratively interprets and reinforces gendered scripts, influenced by **context collapse** (boyd, 2014). The comments reflect a mix of social circles-close friends, acquaintances, and fans-all responding to the performance.

- **Reinforcing the "Foody" Identity:** Many comments directly cite and amplify the "food-loving" identity Grace performs.

  - **Suzan Jeo:** *"Omo you na foody ooo 😂😂"*

  - **HB Namurah:** *"Foody club chairperson, me nah member Sha!!"*

  - **Manji Gotau:** *"You and food na 5&6 🤣🤣🤣"*

    These comments act as a chorus, affirming the acceptability and recognizability of this particular feminine script, one that is relatable and humorous rather than strictly aesthetic.

- **Negotiating Femininity through Appearance and Appetite:** The comments reveal a tension between praising traditional femininity and celebrating her transgressive appetite.

  - **Praise for Appearance:** Several comments focus on her looks, citing conventional feminine norms.

    - **Ita Mangwa Tina:** *"Sugar mummy, you look so beautiful"*

    - **Alheri Yakubu Mabul:** *"Looking good fr"*

    - **Joyce Jonathan Shaida:** *"Your hair is so beautiful ma"*

  - **Questioning the Performance:** Others express amazement or concern about the amount of food, subtly questioning the appropriateness of her performance.

    - **Nerat Gyang:** *"How will she finish this food"*

    - **Ishaya AAglam Adoh:** *"My love this one too plenty for you"*

    - **Mc Slim Osp:** *"Sugar mami ❤️"* (This comment, while affectionate, also uses the "sugar mummy" trope which carries its own gendered and economic connotations).

This blend of comments shows the "performative tightrope" (Simões et al., 2023) users walk on Facebook. Grace's performance is largely celebrated, but the audience simultaneously feels compelled to reaffirm her conventional attractiveness and question the scale of her appetite, demonstrating the constant negotiation of gendered norms in a collapsed context.

Code-Switching and In-Group Solidarity

The data exhibits significant **code-switching**, primarily between English and Nigerian Pidgin, which serves as a tool for building intimacy and performing a shared cultural identity (Daulay et al., 2024).

- **Grace Joseph (OP):** *"Now i know y food no reach me..."* (Uses a colloquial, Pidgin-influenced structure: "y" for "why").

- **Nannyi Rimpyen:** *"There is Always that aunty... 'Abinchi ya Kare'"* (Switches to Hausa for "the food is finished").

- **Mu Nk Izz:** *"Abeg hope Sai Officerr Kodeyi no Sabi the location!"* (Uses Pidgin: "Abeg" - please, "Sai" - that, "Sabi" - know).

- **Officerr Kodeyi:** *"Butan shayi"* (Uses Hausa, likely meaning "Wow" or an expression of amazement).

This strategic code-switching functions as a "script change" (Simões et al., 2023), creating a sense of in-group belonging and authenticity. It marks the conversation as informal, culturally specific, and distinct from a public, English-only performance, showcasing a linguistic strategy for "doing gender" within a particular community.

AngieNation's pregnancy prank

Performing Femininity in a Networked Public

The Facebook comment thread under AngieNation's pregnancy prank video serves as a compelling case study of digital gender performativity. Through collective linguistic practices, female users transform this space into what danah boyd (2014) terms a "networked public," where gender is not merely expressed but actively constructed through what Flores & Antunes (2023) identify as "scripted gender practices."

The dominant performance revolves around a communal call-out script, where users collectively hold Angie accountable to her previous pledge to avoid "preek." This manifests as a **stylized repetition of acts** (Butler, 1988) that reinforces social norms around female fertility management. As Obianuju Onwuka performs: "Angy I thought you said, you no go near prick again 😊" while Mercy Daniel echoes: "See person wey promise us say she no go near preek!📸" These are not isolated comments but performative citations that constitute what Judith Butler would identify as the very substance of gendered identity through repetitive, citational practice.

The linguistic toolkit employed is remarkably sophisticated. **Strategic code-switching** between Nigerian Pidgin and English (Daulay et al., 2024) serves distinct performative functions. Pidgin creates intimacy and humor, as Deborah Michael demonstrates: "Mk e better be prank ooo... We no wan hear anything..........u have two adorable angels already nd they are more than enough ❤️" while Standard English frames broader social commentary: "The irony of life , while some woman are begging to be pregnant others are begging not to be" (Mahsi Vivian Ndicho). This code-switching performs a bilingual, modern Nigerian femininity that navigates between local solidarity and global awareness.

Emojis function as crucial paralinguistic cues (Herring, 1996), with the crying-laughing emoji (😂) universally softening call-outs to maintain social bonds, while hearts (❤️) perform nurturing concern. The commenters' metalinguistic awareness shines through their focus on Angie's word "how," which becomes a communal joke about the mechanics of conception: "It's the 'how' for me like hello mama na husband you have in the house not your brother 🤣" (Moyo Saziso).

Facebook's **context collapse** profoundly shapes these performances. Faced with a flattened audience of close fans and

casual observers, users craft a generalized, publicly intelligible femininity. The humor remains in-group but accessible, while concern is expressed without raw vulnerability. This leads to highly ritualized interactions, where even expressions of relief are performative: "thank God o my heart was beating fast ,no prank us like this again o ," (Mercy Igbima Samson).

While largely reinforcing norms of motherhood and fertility management, the performance allows subtle subversion through linguistic creativity. The blunt use of slang like "preek," "gbola," and "the adult thing" (Melo Jaure) enables open discussion of female sexuality within this female-dominated space. As Whitney Gold Zenith notes: "well no woman can do without gbola sha 🤣" - a statement that simultaneously acknowledges and humorously subverts traditional constraints on female sexual discourse.

The data reveals Facebook as a stage where femininity is performed through collaborative scripting, linguistic hybridity, and strategic humor. Users don't merely react to content; they actively constitute their gendered identities through platform-specific linguistic practices that balance normative reinforcement with communal bonding, demonstrating Butler's crucial insight that gender is not what one is, but what one does through repetitive, stylized acts.

Digital Masculine Performatives: A Cross-Platform Analysis of Male Linguistic Expression on Facebook

This analysis examines male linguistic performance through Facebook comments on a football banter video, applying Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and Computer-Mediated Communication frameworks. The data reveals how male users construct masculinity through competitive discourse, strategic humor, and platform-specific linguistic features, fulfilling the thesis objectives of identifying gendered linguistic patterns across Meta's platforms.

The male commenters engage in distinct **"scripted gender practices"** centered on sports rivalry and competitive positioning. As **Striver GL ‖** performs: "It's easy saying MESSI is the GOAT, you feel relax with no stress. But when you choose a different Sheep, you have to explain till next day 😅" This exemplifies Butler's concept of **"stylized repetition of acts"** - the continual performance of sports expertise and factional alignment that constitutes digital masculinity through what **Anei Madut** terms tribal warfare: "No penalty No party 🎌 Thanks you Benzema for saving us from noise pollution 🙏"

The **linguistic toolkit** demonstrates sophisticated **code-switching** between analytical discourse and vernacular expression. While **Samuel Otieno** cites authoritative sources: "Lionel Messi: 'many players become obsessed with individual records they end up forgetting the main goal, which is the success of the team'" others deploy Nigerian Pidgin for humorous critique, as **Olatunji Kolawole Soge** demonstrates: "Na run I dey run come here ooo 😄 I know say here go don scatter 😅" This code-switching, as Daulay et al. (2024) note, serves as identity negotiation - allowing simultaneous performance of both analytical sophistication and cultural authenticity.

Emoji usage reveals distinct masculine patterns, with **Thē Wëst Priñce** deploying competitive imagery: "The pot is on fire 🔥 👨‍💼💯" while **Yak Dav** uses physicality emojis: "Back day pain Joao feliz. That brother don tire already lol 👊😌" These

performances align with Schwartz et al.'s (2013) identification of male-oriented emoji patterns emphasizing competition and status rather than relational connection.

The data reveals extensive **polycodeic text-image fusion** in complex metaphorical performances. **Davison Jinwa** constructs an elaborate analogy: "Szczęsny: 'Don't compare Ronaldo to Messi, compare Ronaldo to me because we have the same playing style... we both stay in the same area and wait for the ball to come.'" This creolized text (Ryabova & Egorova, 2018) demonstrates how male users blend verbal wit with conceptual imagery to construct gendered expertise, much like **Looqman Horlarwaleh Lawal's** concise critique: "Four misses and you know it's Ronaldo 🙂"

Religious and ritual metaphors constitute another key linguistic strategy, with **Emmanuel B Destiny** performing: "Please where is the offering box let me drop this $100 fast 💸" while **God'swill Uche David** expands: "Kombo you need congregation for background to respond hallelujah 🙆" and **Mozez Treez** questions: "I go pay offering Wednesday/ Sunday I go still pay to Kombo.. where all these offerings Dey go ni 😕" This fusion of religious and sporting discourse creates what Butler would identify as **citational practices** that invoke multiple normative frameworks simultaneously.

The platform's **context collapse** shapes performances toward public expertise demonstration, as **Psamuel Yehosua** analyzes: "Out of 19 possible trophies, he won just one. Now imagine he wins like 15-16 of them... 😵" while **Ugochukwu Moses** celebrates statistical dominance: "Goal!!!!!!!! 2-2 RONALDOOOOOO ⚽ 🏆 951 goals ⚕️" This contrasts with the intimate, relational focus of female discourse in similar networked publics.

While largely conforming to hegemonic masculine norms, the data shows subversion through humor, as **Vincent Tobechukwu** acknowledges: "I no sabi banter shaa, if not una go dey collect back to back 😄" and **Prince Haaland** confesses: "I too like this kombo Forget I'm a Ronaldo fan 😄" performing what Gross (2023) might identify as nuanced gender negotiation through admitted vulnerability.

The commentary also features direct confrontational language, with **Abdul Malik** taunting: "See as your mouth dey smell reach here 💨😌" and **Benjamin Oroh** asserting status: "You know say if CR7 get dog, the dog is still richer than you combo 🐕" while **Dino Ubong Francis** offers elaborate critique: "E be like those days wey Dem go flog us cane, we go pretend dey form alagabara meanwhile the flogging enter mkpopkoro... 😌"

Creative wordplay and neologisms abound, as **Igwe Victor** declares: "COAT: 'Comedian Of All Time' 🃏😆 - I AM. D REAL KOMBO 🐐" and **Dera'm Media** philosophizes: "Sometimes you win , sometimes you Barcelona 👥 ⚽" while **Monokoa Monokoa** creates geographic metaphor: "Ronaldo and trophies na Kaduna and Bayelsa 🗺️∅" (Monokoa's metaphor positions Ronaldo and trophies as geographically distant Nigerian states-implying they rarely meet. In contrast, Messi's career is defined by consistent trophy success, highlighting a perceived gap in achievement.)

The analysis demonstrates that male gender performance on Facebook operates through competitive scripting, polycodeic expertise demonstration, and strategic humor management. As **Tobe Charles** anticipates ongoing drama: "I dey wait for kdc and his keyboard ⌨ , he must sing oo ☺" and **Pretty Bella** acknowledges emotional impact: "This guy banter dey give me Joy ✨☺" these linguistic practices both reinforce conventional masculine norms of sports mastery while allowing space for creative subversion through hybrid discourse, fulfilling the thesis objective of examining how platform-specific communication shapes gender performances across Meta's ecosystem.

Instagram

A Polycodeic Analysis of Gendered Adoration on Instagram

This analysis examines the Instagram comments on a Good Morning America post featuring Heidi Klum's Halloween costumes, applying the thesis's framework of gender performativity and platform-specific affordances. The data reveals a dominant performance of **aspirational, celebratory femininity**, constructed through a **polycodeic linguistic toolkit** and deeply shaped by Instagram's **visual-centric and aesthetically driven architecture**. This performance stands in stark contrast to the collaborative accountability seen on Facebook and highlights how platform design guides gendered "scripts."

The comment section is overwhelmingly characterized by a collective, **scripted practice of celebratory femininity**. Users do not merely state approval; they perform admiration through hyperbolic declarations and emotional effusiveness, constituting what Flores & Antunes (2023) identify as agentive engagement with gendered social scripts. This is not a neutral reaction but a **stylized repetition of acts** (Butler, 1988) that reinforces a norm of enthusiastic, supportive fandom as a feminine-coded behavior. The performance is one of collective worship, as seen in **carlossjavierr**'s declaration: "She's the queen, she's iconic ☺❤" and **peaceundtechno**'s absolute statement: "Simply the most wonderful woman of this planet". This script is repeated and amplified by users like **dexah14** ("Definitely the queen of Halloween"), **torresojd** ("She's is the QUEEN OF HALLOWEEN!!!! ❤❤❤❤❤❤"), and **luisbenavides06** ("Queen"), creating a chorus of gendered affirmation.

The **linguistic toolkit** deployed is fundamentally **polycodeic**, seamlessly blending textual language with a curated selection of emojis to create a holistic, emotionally saturated expression. This aligns with Ryabova & Egorova's (2018) concept of creolized texts, where meaning is generated from the integrated synergy of different semiotic systems. Emojis are not decorative but are crucial, gendered paralinguistic cues (Herring, 1996). The heart-eyes emoji (☺) is a pervasive performative act of adoration, used by **n.c.h** ("☺"), **camrivera92** ("☺"), and countless others. The fire emoji (🔥) signifies being culturally "on fire" or exceptional, as deployed by **sergey.shkolnikov.53** ("🔥🔥🔥") and **alinaoffiziell** ("So ICONIC🔥"). The clapping hands (👏) perform a gesture of approval and celebration, exemplified by **veradieppa** ("👏👏👏👏👏👏🔥🔥🔥🔥") and **leesimon81** ("Cant wait! 👏"). This emoji usage forms a distinct, feminine-coded pattern of emotional and relational

expression, contrasting with the more competitive emoji usage seen in male-dominated football banter.

Hashtags function as a key **citational practice** (Butler), allowing users to inscribe their personal admiration into a broader, public discourse. The comment by **kdolobach23** ("#QueenOfHalloween") is a performative speech act that does not just describe but actively positions Klum, and the user's own fandom, within a specific, gendered cultural niche. This act of tagging is a citation of a communal norm, invoking the collective power of the "Halloween Queen" narrative to strengthen the user's own gendered performance, much as Tungga (2018) observed with community-building hashtags.

The platform's core **affordance of visual-centricity** profoundly shapes these performances, directing them toward aesthetic appreciation and bodily admiration. The commentary is saturated with references to Klum's appearance, creativity, and the physical spectacle of the costumes. **marcicarrizo** focuses on aesthetic allure: "The most beautiful in the world, never lose that sparkle when smiling 🌷". **irishdanceraly** engages with the bodily commitment required: "I'm trying claustrophobic just picturing myself in that worm costume idk how Heidi did it ☺". **vera_vandal** performs an aspirational, professional identity tied to the visual craft: "My dream as a costume maker is to be able to go to a Heidi Halloween Party. ☺". This consistent focus on visual and aesthetic labor confirms Madhura & Panakaje's (2022) emphasis on Instagram as a stage for curated, visually-driven self-presentation and appreciation.

Furthermore, Instagram's architecture facilitates performances of **parasocial intimacy**, where users enact a sense of personal connection with the celebrity figure. This contrasts with the more generalized audience management of Facebook's context collapse. Here, users perform anticipation and personal curiosity, as seen in **babygurlz83**'s comment: "I can't wait to see what she looks like this year" and **mona_kulasic**'s identical sentiment: "Cant wait to see this years costume". **emadarling** takes this intimacy further by asking a practical, personal question: "Just wondering how do u go to toilet with all those costume? 🤔 (serious question)". These performances are facilitated by the platform's design, which fosters a sense of direct access and personal community, what boyd (2014) might describe as a scalable yet intimate networked public.

In conclusion, the Instagram comment section serves as a distinct stage for the performance of a specific, aspirational femininity. This performance is characterized by communal celebration, visual appreciation, and parasocial intimacy. Users employ a polycodeic toolkit, blending hyperbolic text, strategic emojis, and citational hashtags, to create a cohesive gendered utterance that aligns with the platform's normative culture of aesthetic curation. This analysis demonstrates that on Instagram, femininity is performatively constituted through acts of visual admiration and emotional support, a "stylized repetition of acts" that is both enabled and shaped by the platform's very architecture.

A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Masculine Banter on Instagram

This analysis examines the Instagram comments on a post by Nigerian artist Portable, revealing a complex performance of masculinity constructed through a unique blend of competitive banter, cultural literacy, and linguistic hybridity. Situated within the theoretical framework of gender performativity and platform-specific affordances, this case study illustrates how male users

utilize Instagram's visual and interactive environment to enact a script of **competitive camaraderie**, a form of social bonding that operates through ritualized teasing and the public demonstration of cultural knowledge.

The dominant **scripted gender practice** (Flores & Antunes, 2023) observed is one of humorous critique and ritualized insult, a **stylized repetition of acts** (Butler, 1988) that solidifies in-group status. Unlike the celebratory femininity seen on the Heidi Klum post, masculinity here is performed through a communal game of one-upmanship, where the wittiest or most cutting remark earns social capital. This is not hostility but a socially sanctioned performance of toughness and resilience. The comment by **djtoff1**, "God Of Iron 😂", immediately sets a tone of humorous, metaphorical critique. This is swiftly followed by **surveyor_dammy**'s comparison, "See as u resemble Indian gods 😂😂😂", which uses cultural cross-referencing to amplify the joke. The script demands creativity, as seen when **oluchipeculiarekene** invokes traditional West African spirituality: "Potable na Amadioha shrine fit ooo🤣🤣🤣", and **, ganjaree** draws from global pop culture: "Na thanos😂😂". Each of these comments is a performative act that says, "I am part of the in-group that understands these references and participates in this game."

The **linguistic toolkit** employed is profoundly **polycodeic** and culturally specific. The primary vehicle for this performance is a seamless and strategic **code-switching** between Nigerian Pidgin and English, a practice that Daulay et al. (2024) identify as central to identity negotiation online. This creates a distinct linguistic space where authenticity is paramount. **captbalo_miami** performs this perfectly: "But you dey Tewo for street normal nw, why you no won tewo for middle man when won carry you go meet ur helper." The use of "tewo" (a slang for showing off or flexing) is a clear marker of cultural fluency. Similarly, **uchewhyz**'s comment, "I dey wait for d day dis guy go speak good English", is not a genuine wish but a playful jab that reinforces the value of his distinctive Pidgin persona. This linguistic choice is a collective performance of a shared, localized identity.

Emojis in this context function as crucial tonal moderators and amplifiers within this competitive framework. The crying-laughing emoji (😂) is ubiquitous, serving to ensure that even the sharpest critiques are interpreted within the bounds of playful banter. **stwize_ofabuja1** uses a veritable wall of them: "🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣", as does **officiala1vibe** ("😂😂😂😂"). The microphone emoji (🎤), used by **abdulmagarionline** ("🎤🎤🎤🎤") and **scotty___1000** ("Kolo when sabi use microphone 🎤😂😂😂"), is particularly significant. It simultaneously acknowledges Portable's profession as a musician while using the symbol of his craft to mock him, a nuanced act of gendered teasing that shows both respect and rivalry.

A key finding is the prevalence of **pragmatic and physical critique** as a masculine performance. The comments frequently focus on the practicality, safety, and cost of Portable's flamboyant appearance, a form of engagement that aligns with stereotypically masculine concerns with functionality and value. **ugoapex_** performs an economic analysis: "All these chains no pass $150". **buzzy_cee** questions the utility: "Is all those things in your neck necessary 🤣✋". A recurring theme is the perceived

danger of his metallic jewelry, with **iwuezi.kinglevel** warning, "Oga no wear those iron near transformer 🤣🤣", and **emo_gtv** adding, "Pls becareful will still Dey rainy season , just because of thunder strike ,". These are not mere safety tips but performative acts that demonstrate a "street-smart," practical form of intelligence, a valued trait in this masculine script.

The platform's **affordances** are leveraged to foster a sense of **collaborative critique**. Instagram's architecture allows for a rapid-fire, public exchange where users build upon each other's jokes, creating a layered, communal performance. When one user makes an "iron man" joke, another adds a warning about transformers, and a third suggests he avoid magnets, as **a.c.cwhizzy** does: "No go near magnet ooo😂😂😂😂😂😂". This creates a synergistic effect where the collective wit exceeds any single contribution, reinforcing group cohesion through shared participation in the banter.

While the performance is largely about conformity to norms of tough, humorous camaraderie, it also contains moments of **subversion and support**. **ratel_daniel19** offers a sincere blessing: "As you sleep tonight, God will settle that request for you. Amen 🏢", introducing a note of genuine spirituality. **sojisugre** provides unironic praise: "Thanks for being graceful, and for exposing the jagudas [frauds]." These comments show that the script is not monolithic; there is space within the performance for alternative masculine expressions of faith and respect, though they remain secondary to the dominant mode of banter.

In conclusion, this Instagram comment section functions as a dynamic stage for the performance of a specific, culturally-grounded masculinity. Through a polycodeic toolkit of Nigerian Pidgin, strategic emojis, and creative cultural metaphors, users engage in a script of competitive camaraderie. This performance, characterized by ritualized teasing, practical critique, and collaborative joke-building, demonstrates how gender is not merely expressed but actively constituted through platform-specific linguistic practices. It reveals Instagram as a space where global platform mechanics are harnessed for the performance of intensely local and nuanced gendered identities.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp – Intimacy and the Dialogic Performance of Gender

The data from the "Brown2Green(IX)" WhatsApp group offers a compelling view into what the theoretical framework identifies as a "back stage" environment (Flores & Antunes, 2023). Here, the platform's core affordances, **privacy, synchronicity, and intimacy**, facilitate a mode of gender performativity that is distinct from the curated visuality of Instagram or the context-collapsed public of Facebook. Gender is not a static presentation but a dynamic, co-constructed achievement enacted through the conversational flow. The analysis reveals a sophisticated linguistic toolkit employed by users, centering on **Paralinguistic Affirmation and Relational Work, In-Group Cultural Coding through Code-Switching,** and **Conversational Pragmatics as Performance.**

Paralinguistic Affirmation and Relational Work

A primary finding is the central role of emojis and images in performing relational solidarity and emotional nuance. User

nicknames themselves are performative; "Ajoke ♦", "Boosede T!✨", and "Cece😊" use emojis to construct a persistent identity of warmth, sparkle, and affection from the outset. This is not mere decoration; it is a continuous citation of a friendly, emotionally available persona, a "stylized repetition of acts" that begins before the conversation even starts (Butler, 1988).

Within the dialogue, emojis function as crucial tools for managing tone and building consensus. When ~Hoi-polloi🖤 states, "The japa is getting too much honestly who never japa be like him world done end😂," the crying-laughter emoji performs a critical function. It frames a statement about a desperate situation not with despair, but with shared, resilient humour. This use of 😂 is a citational practice that invokes a specific cultural script among Nigerian youth, using laughter to cope with collective hardship. It softens the critique and transforms it into a bonding ritual. Similarly, the single "👍" from ~Hoi-polloi💙 in response to a point about the US being the best destination acts as a powerful, non-verbal agreement, a minimalist yet effective performance of alignment and support within the group's rapid-fire conversation.

The shared image of a dog and cat together posted by ~SamzyPR serves a similar bonding function. In the context of a debate about which countries are "good," this non-verbal cue acts as a pacifying, humorous intervention, visually reinforcing a sense of community and shared understanding beyond what words can convey. This polycodeic communication (Ryabova & Egorova, 2018), though simpler than an Instagram post, is equally potent in building relational intimacy.

In-Group Cultural Coding and Identity Negotiation

The most salient linguistic feature is the pervasive **code-switching** between English and Nigerian Pidgin, which users deploy as a sophisticated tool for identity negotiation (Daulay et al., 2024). This practice is central to performing a shared, nuanced cultural identity. The conversation seamlessly transitions from formal English ("If housing, food and social amenities are affordable for the common man") to deeply embedded Pidgin, often to express core personal stances or humour.

For instance, ~Grace clarifies her position with a mix of English and Pidgin: "You right .. but **wetin I wan sell when them give me funding already**." Here, the shift to Pidgin ("what do I want to sell") grounds her argument in a relatable, authentic voice. This strategic alternation is even more pronounced in debates. ~SamzyPR challenges others with a full Pidgin statement: "**Person wey no comot Abule egba go tell you say Portugal no good..**" (A person who has never left their local community will tell you Portugal is not good). This is not just a statement of opinion; it is a performance of cultural savvy and a subtle demarcation of in-group (those with exposure) from out-group (those from "Abule egba").

Furthermore, ~t.mkor uses the money bag emoji (💰) to visually punctuate a rhetorical question about the practicality of selling assets: "Is it not what some1 has dt the person will sell to get the money 💰 to travel?" This creolized text (Anisimova, 2003) merges language and symbol to create a cohesive, culturally-informed argument about economics and migration, demonstrating how meaning is constructed through multiple semiotic systems even in a text-heavy platform.

Conversational Pragmatics as Gendered Performance

Finally, gender and social identity are performed through the very structure and pragmatics of the conversation. The dialogue exemplifies a "collaborative floor," where turns are short, overlapping, and dedicated to building upon each other's points. This is evident in the rapid, supportive exchanges that build consensus:

"Not just the currency the insecurity and tribal wars" ~Hoi-polloi🖤: "The insecurity and tribal war is caused by poverty...   nonsense"
"**Exactly   my   point**"
~Hoi-polloi🖤: "We don't need to have mansion just basics needs allow .. the japa self wil reduce"

This chain shows a performance of solidarity, where participants actively listen and expand on each other's ideas, a linguistic style often associated with building rapport (Tannen, 1994). The performance lies in the flow-the ability to engage in rapid, co-constructed dialogue that values connection.

Even during disagreement, the pragmatic goal seems to be maintaining relational harmony. When ~t.mkor challenges the group's generalizations ("Guys out of how many??"), the response is not aggression but reflective emojis and concessions. ~Hoi-polloi💙 replies with "**Hmmm word**" and later "😂😂", using laughter to de-escalate while ~t.mkor elaborates their point. This showcases a performative style where managing the social dynamics of the group is intertwined with the expression of opinion, a nuanced "script" (Simões, R. B., Amaral, I., Flores, A. M., & Antunes, E., 2023) facilitated by WhatsApp's private, synchronous environment.

In conclusion, this WhatsApp data demonstrates that gender and cultural identity are performed through a complex interplay of paralinguistic cues, strategic code-switching, and conversational collaboration. The "back stage" affordances of the platform beget a performance that is less about a curated visual self and more about demonstrating one's role within a dynamic, intimate social network. This analysis provides a clear contrast to the performances on other Meta platforms, underscoring the core argument that digital gender is a fluid, context-dependent achievement shaped by the specific architectural "stage" on which it is performed.

Analysis of a Second WhatsApp Case: Humour, Rapport, and Contextual Shortening

This second data sample from the "ABU 2021 PHENOMENAL SET..." WhatsApp group further enriches our understanding of gendered linguistic performance in private digital spaces. While the previous case highlighted socio-political debate, this extract showcases a different "script" (Flores & Antunes, 2023) prevalent in back-stage communication: the use of humour, contextual shortening, and relational banter to perform group solidarity and shared experience. The analysis reinforces how WhatsApp's intimate affordances facilitate performances that are deeply embedded in a shared social and cultural history.

Humour and Shared Cultural Citation as a Performative Act

The primary linguistic performance here is the use of a culturally specific analogy to create humour and affirm in-group membership. The user Atangs initiates this by commenting on an unseen event (likely a photo or video shared in the chat), stating:

"Omoh, the last time I see person day pull something like this na during tug of war for NYSC camp"

This statement is a rich performative utterance. The use of "Omoh" (a Nigerian Pidgin exclamation akin to "Wow" or "Seriously") immediately sets an informal, culturally-grounded tone. The core of the performance, however, is the citation of a shared cultural experience: the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) camp, a mandatory year of service for Nigerian graduates. By invoking the specific, physically intense memory of a "tug of war," Atangs does more than just make a joke. They perform a shared Nigerian graduate identity, creating an immediate bond with others in the group who understand this reference. This aligns with Butler's concept of citationality; the humour derives its power from reiterating a common, normative experience within this specific community (Butler J. , 1988). The act of laughing together online, about a past shared experience, becomes a way of "doing" community and reinforcing a collective identity.

Contextual Shortening and the Affordance of Intimacy

A key observation is the highly elliptical and context-dependent nature of the language. The entire conversation revolves around an unstated referent, the "this" in "pull something like this." This linguistic strategy is a direct function of WhatsApp's affordances. In a private group with a shared history, users do not need to provide full context. This creates a language that is efficient and reinforces in-group/out-group boundaries; an outsider cannot fully understand the conversation, but for members, it builds intimacy.

This is further evidenced by the closing statement from Big Pill: "E don do naaa" (Meaning: "That's enough now" or "It's okay, stop it"). This phrase, delivered in Pidgin, is a soft, colloquial way of closing the banter. It performs a role of gentle moderation or signalling the end of a humorous exchange. The use of Pidgin instead of formal English underscores the informal, "back-stage" nature of the interaction, where the pressure for standardized language is lifted, allowing for a more authentic, culturally-specific performance of peer relationships.

Minimalist Paralinguistic Cues and Conversational Flow

Unlike the first case, this thread does not heavily feature emojis or GIFs. This illustrates that the "linguistic toolkit" is adaptable. Here, the performance is carried almost entirely by the humorous analogy and the pragmatic turn-taking. The repetition of Atangs' initial message by Big Pill ("Omoh, the last time...") could be interpreted as a form of digital echo, a way to affirm the joke, show alignment, and actively participate in the co-construction of the humorous moment. This minimalist repetition is itself a paralinguistic cue, signalling "I agree and I find this funny too," which strengthens the relational bond without needing additional symbols.

Comparative Analysis: The Stylized Repetition of Acts Across Meta's Architectured Stages

This cross-platform analysis synthesizes the findings from Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to argue that gender is not a monolithic identity performed uniformly online, but a fluid construct whose very "stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 1988) is fundamentally disciplined by the specific architectural and social affordances of each digital stage. The comparative lens reveals a

clear taxonomy: Facebook serves as a public square for managing context-collapsed scripts, Instagram as a curated gallery for aesthetic and visual citational practices, and WhatsApp as a private backstage for dialogic and pragmatic identity negotiation.

Facebook: The Public Square of Context-Collapsed Scripts On Facebook, the pervasive condition of context collapse (boyd, 2014) necessitates gender performances that are generalized, publicly intelligible, and strategically navigated. The analyses of Grace Joseph's post and the football banter thread reveal performances tailored for a heterogeneous audience of family, friends, and acquaintances. The primary linguistic tools are polycodeic anchoring and collaborative scripting. For instance, Grace's post combined an image of exaggerated consumption with a caption framing it as a humorous social complaint. This polycodeic utterance (Ryabova & Egorova, 2018) was then co-constructed by the audience, who reinforced the "Jovial Foodie" script with comments like "You and food na 5&6" while simultaneously disciplining it through labels like "Sugar mummy" and concerns over her body. Similarly, in male-dominated spaces, masculinity was performed through competitive banter and statistical expertise, a public demonstration of knowledge safe for a broad audience. The performance is a tightrope walk, balancing self-expression with the need to remain interpretable across diverse social circles.

Instagram: The Curated Gallery of Aesthetic Citationality In stark contrast, Instagram's affordance of visual-centricity scripts gender performances that are highly aestheticized, aspirational, and oriented towards citational practices of admiration and style. The platform operates as a curated gallery where the "stylized repetition of acts" is deeply polycodeic, fusing image, filter, caption, and hashtag into a single, cohesive gendered utterance. The analysis of the Heidi Klum post exemplifies this, where femininity was performed almost exclusively through hyperbolic, celebratory comments ("QUEEN OF HALLOWEEN!!!! ❤️") and strategic emoji use (☺, 👆, ✋). This is a script of aspirational affiliation. Conversely, on Portable's page, masculinity was performed through a visually-grounded script of competitive camaraderie, using cultural metaphors ("God Of Iron") and pragmatic critiques of his appearance ("All these chains no pass $150"). In both cases, the performance is intrinsically tied to the visual object-the celebrity or the artist-and the linguistic tools serve to position the user within a specific aesthetic and cultural community, often marked by citational hashtags like #QueenOfHalloween.

WhatsApp: The Private Backstage of Dialogic Pragmatics WhatsApp, defined by its affordances of privacy, synchronicity, and ephemerality, facilitates a "back stage" performance (Flores & Antunes, 2023) where gender is enacted not for a broad audience but within the flow of intimate, dialogic exchange. The linguistic toolkit shifts dramatically from the declarative to the pragmatic and relational. Gender is performed through the micro-practices of conversation: rapid turn-taking, strategic code-switching, and paralinguistic affirmation. In the "Brown2Green" group, analysis showed that identity was negotiated through seamless shifts between English and Nigerian Pidgin, a practice that performs cultural fluency and in-group solidarity. Emojis were used not for aesthetic declaration but for relational work-a "👆" to signal agreement, or "☺" to frame a difficult topic like migration ("the japa is getting too much") with resilient humour. The second case further highlighted this with context-dependent humour and elliptical language ("E don do naaa"), which relies entirely on

shared history. Here, the performance of gender and community is embedded in the very structure of the dialogue, a collaborative floor where the primary goal is maintaining relational harmony.

Conclusion: The Platform as Co-Author of Gender This tripartite comparison conclusively demonstrates that the question is not *if* gender is performed online, but *how* its performance is technologically mediated. The same theoretical construct-Butlerian performativity-manifests in linguistically distinct forms across Meta's empire. Facebook's context collapse begets guarded, collaboratively-policed scripts. Instagram's visualism begets aesthetic, citational performances. WhatsApp's privacy begets intimate, dialogic identity negotiation. Therefore, the platform is not a neutral conduit but a co-author of the gendered performance, its architecture actively shaping the lexicon, syntax, and very possibilities of the "stylized repetition of acts" that constitute digital gender identity. Understanding identity in the digital age thus requires this nuanced, platform-sensitive approach, recognizing that the self is not merely presented but is constituted differently across the distinct yet interconnected stages of the modern social media landscape.

Discussion of findings

In light of the cross-platform data analysis, the findings herein make a strong case for the fact that digital gender is not a monolithic performance but a fluid construct shaped by the architectural "stage" of each platform. This discussion uncovers a taxonomy very clearly: Facebook, being a public square, requires generalized and strategically ambiguous performances due to context collapse. Users navigate a heterogeneous audience by using polycodeic anchoring, such as image-caption synergy, and collaborative scripting where the audience polices and reinforces gendered norms, as in the simultaneous celebration and questioning of Grace Joseph's "foody" femininity. On the contrary, Instagram is used as a curated gallery in which the logics of visual-centricity assure highly aesthetic, citational performances. On the basis of a polycodeic toolkit of hyperbolic text, strategic emojis (e.g., ☺, ●) and hashtags, gender would be performed by aspirational affiliation to particular gendered communities ranging from the celebratory fandom for Heidi Klum to the competitive and culturally-grounded banter on Portable's page. Meanwhile, WhatsApp represents a private backstage where the privacy and synchronicity of the interaction allow for intimate, dialogical performances of gender. It is co-construed in real-time by conversational pragmatics, strategic code-switching, and paralinguistic cues (e.g., ☺ to frame hardship with humour). Attention is shifted from declarative self-presentation to relational work and in-group solidarity, highlighting more fluid, context-contingent identity negotiation. Ultimately, this comparative analysis confirms that the platform is a co-author of gender. The same theoretical construct of Butlerian performativity materializes through linguistically different forms that are dictated by the specific affordances of visibility, permanence, and social structure that are peculiar to Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this paper is that gender identity on social media does not reflect some sort of inner self but is instead a dynamic performance, inherently structured by the architecture of the platform. The cross-platform analysis provides a clear taxonomy: Facebook's context collapse nurtures generalized, collaboratively-

policed scripts; the Instagram visual-centricity leads to aesthetic, citational performances of admiration and style; and finally, WhatsApp's privacy allows intimate, dialogic identity negotiation via conversational pragmatics and code-switching. This paper synthesizes the theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler with Sociolinguistics of Computer-Mediated Communication to show that the "stylized repetition of acts" constituting gender is technologically mediated. Indeed, it proves that the platform is a co-author of the gendered self by exploring how linguistic tools such as emojis, hashtags, and code-switching function in each stage. Ultimately, the findings confirm that digital gender is a fluid and context-dependent accomplishment. Any conception of identity in the digital age requires a platform-sensitive approach, recognizing that the self is not merely represented online, but is constituted differently across the different, architectured stages of the modern social media ecosystem.

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