



Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of Gendered Language and Ideology on Social Media Platforms

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Abstract— This paper will analyse women representation in social media discourse by applying Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis and will investigate how women are represented linguistically and visually on social media platforms like Instagram, Sanpchat, X and Utube. The data has been gathered from verified and unverified social media accounts with the help of convenient random sampling. The material is in the form of photos, written texts, and videos for a thorough examination. The chosen accounts include X handles like Richard Cooper, the Instagram accounts parity_colorism and thesolidaritysisters. The select Snapchat handles include DRESS CODE, Girls Only. Care has been taken that these posts represent both male and female worlds and the researcher will make the case that the social media content is fundamentally ideological, and that regular events, actions, and issues posted on social media articulate dominant (and occasionally alternative) ideological discourses about the prejudiced nature of our society. It shall be argued that gender politics is present in all types of social media comments and platforms, not so much in terms of formal politics but a more banal and everyday kind. The marketing of these accounts is the hidden motivation behind posting such posts and they do not support the idea that these technologies are democratic or impartial by nature. This paper will also investigate the social contexts within which symbolic forms are employed and deployed to determine whether such forms establish or sustain relations of domination and whether ideological analysis of all elements of the social media content come together to tell the same story that is, patriarchal capitalism. Considering the insights that social media discourse is structured by male dominance; that every discourse is historically produced and interpreted and that dominance structures are legitimated by ideologies of powerful groups(male), this paper will specifically consider gender and social media discourses in the broadest sense, to testify overt relations of gender bias and social inequality. It will also dissect sexism and female objectification by using the Dialectical Relational Approach and suggest ways to reduce gender bias through social media.



Keywords— Social media, Gender, Language and Ideology, Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, Dialectical Relational Approach.

I. INTRODUCTION

Although the term 'social media' has still not been clearly defined in social sciences, but its popularity and penetration resulted in a never-before-seen amount of influence on ordinary people's language use and online public discourse (Tamássy, Zsuzsanna 94). The 21st century was male

dominated in terms of technology and a survey report in 2000 showed that males are twice engaged in online media in comparison to women (Dasgupta 44). Technological advancements have been a tool of masculine power because of this lack of imparity in participation in the online world between men and women (Dasgupta 44). The Pew Research

Report of 2000 showed that women started using social media much more than men to maintain relationships (Dasgupta 44). Despite this different research studies show that men upload pictures that make them seem independent and active while women focus more on looking attractive. Social media for long is reinforcing the notion of gender stereotyping through its content, be it through the underrepresentation of women on social media or the portrayal of gender stereotypes (Dasgupta 42). The recent example of Radhika Merchant being trolled for getting engaged to Anant Ambani and the stereotypical portrayal of women marrying rich men for money despite coming from an affluent family bears testimony to the fact that stereotyping can be used to direct and distort cognition and can have, a profound impact on the perception and judgments, of the people who come across such social media posts. Social media platforms are intimately bound up with patriarchal capitalism. In the paper, "Portrayal of Women in Advertising on Facebook and Instagram", Luo and Hao state that the media may not really be an agent of change but may help reinforce the societal ideology that already exists (Nkem, Fab-Ukozor, et al. 149). When this ideology has to do with gender, social media may go ahead to reinforce gender biases. For example, believing that all women love to shop or that 'boys don't cry'. Society has unconsciously given gender roles and it is these gender roles that are used by social media users to spread prejudice against women in society.

II. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The term 'discourse analysis' was first used by the linguist, Zelling Harris in his 1952 article entitled 'Discourse Analysis' which is a method for the analysis of connected speech or writing, for continuing descriptive linguistics beyond the limit of a simple sentence at a time (Kamalu et al. 169). Critical discourse analysis emerged from 'critical linguistics' and was developed at the University of East Anglia by Roger Fowler and fellow scholars in the 1970s, and the terms are now often interchangeable (Wodak 1). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to study the discourse that views language as a form of practice. It focuses on the properties of 'naturally occurring' language use by real language users, larger units than isolated words and sentences, the study of action and interaction, and the extension to non-verbal aspects of interaction and communication (Wodak 3). The paper shall study the language (verbal and non-verbal) used in selected social media uploads through Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis and three concepts which are indispensable in all CDA: the concept of power, the concept of history, and the concept of ideology shall be addressed in

the paper (Wodak 2). CDA regards 'language as social practice' and takes into consideration the context of language especially the relation between language and power (Wodak 1). Habermas claims that 'language is also a medium of domination and social force and it serves to legitimize relations of organized power (Wodak 3).

Nevertheless, Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis aims to examine the way language, images, and other forms of semiotic resources are used to construct meaning and power relations in different social and cultural contexts. It involves examining the use of different modalities, such as color, font, layout, and sound, to understand how they contribute to the overall meaning of a text and how they may reinforce or challenge dominant power relations (Quan-Haase, Anabel, and Luke, eds 246). In fact, as Kaindl also states, "non-verbal elements in multimodal texts not only perform the function of illustrating the linguistic part of the text but also play an integral role in the constitution of meaning, whether through interaction with the linguistic elements or as an independent semiotic system" (Kaindl 176).

Another aspect of CDA and of immense importance is Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis. Feminist CDA implies a perspective that is comparativist rather than universalizing, attentive to the discursive aspects of the forms of oppression and interests that divide as well as unite groups of women. Underlying a critical feminist analysis of discourse in the domain of social media is based on the principle of 'gender relationality', which may be signalled explicitly or maintained implicitly in the studies (Lazar 12). Gender relationality entails a Feminist CDA focus on two kinds of relationships. First, and primarily, the focus is on the discursive co-constructions of ways of doing and being a woman and a man in particular communities of practice (Lazar 12). Second, gender relationality entails an analytic focus also on the dynamics between forms of masculinity specifically, in terms of how these participate within hierarchies of oppression that affect women (Lazar 12).

III. POSTMODERNIST FEMINIST MEDIA THEORY

One focal idea in postmodernist media hypothesis is hyperreality, which includes the obscuring of limits among the real world and its portrayal in media (Lazar 18). As indicated by postmodernist scholars, media portrayals are not simple impressions of the real world but rather effectively built inside social and authentic settings. Curiously, these portrayals frequently feel more genuine to us than the real occasions they depict (Lazar 18). One more huge thought in postmodernist media hypothesis is simulacra, which alludes to duplication or impersonations of reality that become more genuine than the first (Lazar

18). In this point of view, social media portrayals fill in for the real world, supplanting the genuine itself (Lazar 18). Postmodernist media hypothesis likewise stresses the job of force in moulding media depictions, especially regarding how predominant gatherings use media to control accounts encompassing race, orientation, class, and gender (Lazar 18).

Inside postmodernist women's activist media hypothesis, a key idea is diversity, perceiving that people hold numerous crossing characters — like orientation, race, class, sexuality, and capacity — that shape encounters of persecution and honor (Lazar 18). In this unique situation, media portrayals are built through social and verifiable settings as well as through the convergences of these characters (Lazar 18).

IV. DISSECTING SEXISM AND OBJECTIFICATION: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS USING THE DIALECTICAL RELATIONAL APPROACH

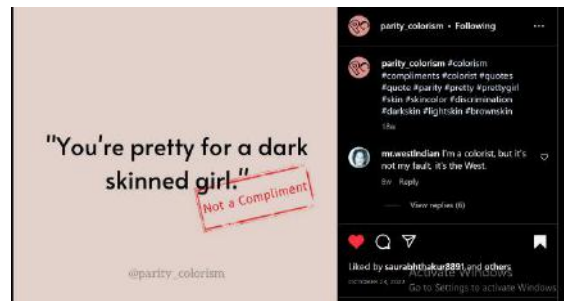
Postmodernist women's activist media scholars contend that media frequently decrease ladies to sexual items or support customary orientation jobs, for example, the assumption that ladies ought to be overseers while men are the providers (Lazar 18). Moreover, the idea of the male look in postmodernist women's activist media hypothesis features how media portrayals much of the time embrace the viewpoint of a hetero male watcher, generalizing and sexualizing ladies while sustaining conventional orientation jobs (Lazar 18).

An approach of CDA that shall help us to understand sexism and objectivism in a better way is the Dialectical Relational Approach which is guided by several distinct stages. The first focus of Stage 1 is on locating instances of wrongdoing that have the potential to be investigated in a useful way by looking at the complex interactions between semiotic and extra-semiotic aspects (Fairclough 227). The crucial issue that must be answered before moving on to Stage 2 is: What elements of the current social order contribute to the perpetuation of this wrongdoing (Fairclough 227)? As we go into Stage 3, a crucial question arises: Does the observed social wrongdoing result from basic faults in the current social order, necessitating a radical shift in the societal framework to address it? Or is it a problem that can be solved without calling for such extensive structural changes (Fairclough 227)? The next step, Stage 4, digs into the investigation of various methods to overcome the challenges identified in Stage 2 (Fairclough 227).

And in context of sexism, the Whorfian hypothesis also stated that language and categories shape how people see

the world, and that a sexist world has been created by men, the inventors of those categories. Spender articulated the same idea in a stronger way when she talked about English language as a gender-biased system as opposed to a linguistic system within which usages have acquired a masculine orientation (Sunderland 10). Prompted by the identification of sexist language as language that defined, trivialised and degraded women and rendered them 'invisible'. Invisibility' referred to the use of 'generics' ('man' and 'he') and 'man'-compounds, with their masculine bias (Sunderland 34). The American feminist Robin Morgan claimed strongly in 1968 in "Going Too Far" that, 'The very semantics of the language reflect women's condition (Sunderland 10). By 1970 Emily Toth, in her famous "Female Eunuch", notes how 'terms of endearment' for women are also terms for food ('honey', 'sweetie'). Through lexical items such as 'Mrs/Miss', 'son-of-a-bitch' and 'manageress', the English language was said to 'define, degrade and stereotype' women, and through the so-called 'generics' 'he' and 'man', to render them invisible (Sunderland 10).

Another example can be illustrated, in the post given below, at first glance, the statement in the Instagram post by parity_colorism. It may appear to be a compliment, but upon closer examination, it reveals a variety of problematic assumptions and implications.



By singling out the person's skin colour and using it as a qualifier for their beauty, the statement reinforces the idea that lighter skin is more desirable and beautiful than darker skin. Additionally, the use of the word "for" suggests that the person's beauty is unexpected or surprising given their dark skin. This implies that dark-skinned people are generally considered less attractive, which is not only untrue but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes. The statement is an example of microaggression, which refers to subtle forms of discrimination that can have a cumulative negative impact on individuals and communities. By devaluing and marginalizing people based on their skin colour, language like this perpetuates systemic inequalities and reinforces harmful social norms.

Even fashion and beauty standards articulate a postfeminist ideology through notions of empowerment via sexuality and consumption and engages a postfeminist aesthetic of the

‘sexy’, desirable young woman (Vänskä et al. 2). According to Hirschberg, Lurie has a semiotic approach to clothing, viewing it as a language consisting of signs that convey meaning within specific social and cultural contexts (Hirschberg 143). She sees clothing, along with hairstyles, accessories, and body decoration, as an expressive vocabulary that communicates intentions, emotions, values, and beliefs. Theoretically, this vocabulary is vast and includes every garment and style ever created, but in practice, an individual's resources may be limited (Hirschberg 143). The most significant sign in clothing is color, which has an immediate impact on the viewer. As someone approaches, the hue of their clothes becomes more noticeable and affects our nervous system. In some situations, certain hues are considered impolite, much like an inappropriate tone of voice (Hirschberg 147). For instance, a bride wearing a black wedding dress or a stockbroker greeting clients in a shocking pink three-piece suit would be akin to screaming out loud.

Beauty is concerned with physical and mental health as both are intimately related. Short-term decisions to alter one's body structure irrespective of genetic, environmental, occupational, and nutritional needs can leave medium and long-term effects. Episode 19 of Season 1 (<https://t.snapchat.com/6tMbCpLU>) of the handle Girls Only on Snapchat explains how do women take recourse to actual surgeries like the Brazilian Butt Lift (BBL) in which they take fat from your body and inject it in the buttocks to make them look a certain way. Women who opt for such surgeries end up having a painful recovery and at times, fail to survive. Everyday a new body trend or new face trend becomes popular, and women are constantly challenged to look skinnier, sexier and several women go through such surgeries knowing the risk of losing their lives.

Sexism which is a modern form of prejudice characterized by the denial of the continued discrimination and antagonism toward women's demands. According to Brown, the agenda behind posting sexist content is limiting women's self-identified ambitions, and disproportionately reducing female political candidates (Brown 3). A critical analysis of the post given below will highlight the gendered implications and stereotypes embedded in the comparison between a tiger's tongue and a woman's tongue.



Firstly, the comparison between the strength of a tiger's tongue and a woman's tongue perpetuates the stereotype of women as inherently more emotional and talkative than men. This stereotype has been used historically to justify the exclusion of women from public discourse and positions of power. Secondly, the characterization of a woman's tongue as "more dangerous than a tiger's tongue" reinforces the stereotype of women as manipulative and malicious, using their words to harm and control others. This stereotype is often used to undermine women's credibility and authority in interpersonal and professional contexts. Thirdly, the comparison between a tiger's tongue and a woman's tongue reinforces the gender binary and heteronormative assumptions about gender and power. It suggests that women are inherently weaker than men and that their only source of power is through their words.

Sexism is predominantly of two types: Benevolent Sexism and Hostile Sexism. Benevolent sexism is defined as a generally positive attitude towards women in traditional roles that continues the male gaze and male privilege (Brown 4). Benevolent sexism includes the idealization of women for their sexual purity or availability, protective paternalism, and/or the general perception that women are weak or fragile (Brown 4). Benevolent sexist comments to women are commonly misunderstood as "compliments", like the use of phrases such as "No man succeeds without a good woman beside him" and "they're probably surprised at how smart you are, for a girl" (Brown 4).

Hostile sexism is generally defined as a person's negative perception of women that can be shown through dominative paternalism, derogatory beliefs or actions toward women, or heterosexual hostility. Hostile sexism is related to many negative outcomes both in the workplace and home settings. Within the workplace, it can enforce the "glass-ceiling" effect, when women are often unable to reach leadership or managerial positions due to hostile sexism (Brown 4).

For instance, the statement in the post given below that "employers favour men not because they are prejudiced against women, but they have a perception that men perform

better on an average in certain tasks" is problematic from a feminist perspective as it reinforces gender stereotypes, ignores systemic discrimination, and fails to acknowledge the intersectionality of gender with other forms of oppression.



Firstly, it reinforces gender stereotypes and perpetuates the idea that certain tasks are inherently "male" or "female" which is a result of patriarchal socialization, which assigns specific roles and characteristics to each gender. Secondly, the statement ignores the systemic discrimination that women face in the workplace, and it has a significant impact on hiring, promotion, and pay decisions. This is known as "implicit bias," and it can result in women being overlooked for opportunities and undervalued in their work. Finally, the statement fails to acknowledge the ways in which gender intersects with other forms of oppression, such as race, class, and sexuality. Women who belong to marginalized groups may face additional barriers and discrimination in the workplace, which exacerbates existing gender inequalities.

Upholding sexism, whether hostile or benevolent, continues to increase associating them with these negative stereotypes, increasing mental burnout, and upholding outdated views of women that push in the direction of inequality.



The statement in the above tweet by Richard Cooper presents a stark double standard when it comes to loyalty, depending on a person's gender. It reinforces traditional societal expectations of men and women, with men being

seen as successful and powerful, and women being viewed as passive and supportive. It suggests that a man's loyalty is measured based on his success, implying that the more successful a man is, the more he deserves loyalty from his partner. Therefore, men are expected to be dominant and successful in all aspects of life, including relationships, while their partners should be submissive and supportive, even if they are unhappy or mistreated. On the other hand, it suggests that a woman's loyalty is tested when a man is unsuccessful, implying that her loyalty is contingent on her partner's success. This reinforces the idea that women are supposed to be supportive and nurturing, even when their partners are failing, and that their worth is tied to their partner's success. The statement ignores the complexity of relationships and the fact that loyalty is not something that can be reduced to a simple test. Richard Cooper has also written a book, *The Unplugged Alpha: The No Bullsh*t Guide to Winning with Women & Life*, and the fourth Chapter, "20 Red Flags" is full of many such stereotypical statements. For instance, the chapter starts with a statement: "She has more red flags than a Chinese communist parade." This statement is a metaphor comparing someone's warning signs or indicators to the number of red flags that might be seen in a Chinese communist parade. The use of "more" suggests that the person (woman in this case) being described has an excessive or unusually high number of warning signs. The metaphor of a Chinese communist parade is used to emphasize the abundance of these warning signs, as such parades are known for their abundance of red flags. However, it's worth noting that using "Chinese communist" in this context might be considered insensitive or offensive to some people, as it reinforces negative stereotypes about a specific culture or political ideology.

V. MISGUIDED FEMINISM

Feminism is urgently needed, and social media significantly contributes to women's empowerment and equality with men. One might be astonished to learn that there are still some facilities offering virginity tests, especially in developed western nations like the UK. The World Health Organization (WHO) claims that there is no scientific way to determine if a woman is virgin or not, promoting a myth about women's health, physical appearance, and sexuality (Stonehouse, 2020). Therefore, feminism is needed. But feminism is not anti-male; feminism is anti-patriarchy. It is an effort to put a stop to oppression, exploitation, and misogyny.

In *Reflections on language* (1998) it has been mentioned that Eugene R. August believes that sexist language is not one-sided and can also stereotype and dehumanize men. (Hirschberg 246). While the political correctness movement

addresses sexist language, it may overlook the extent to which men are victims of it. Psychologist Herb Goldberg rejects the notion of masculine privilege and provides statistics showing higher rates of early death, disease, suicide, crime, accidents, emotional disorders, alcoholism, and drug addiction among men (Hirschberg 246). However, breaking away from traditional gender roles can lead to hostile opposition expressed through gender-biased terms. Unlike girls who are allowed to behave in a "boyish" way, boys who display "girlish" behaviour are often stigmatized as homosexual without an equivalent term like "tomboy" (Hirschberg 247). The English language has a rich vocabulary of insults to ridicule boys who are gentle, quiet, and emotional. Even though some terms may be used playfully, they can still be used to insult males from childhood to adulthood (Hirschberg 247).

Feminism opposes cultural systems and attitudes that prioritize men over women. It refutes the idea that all men are the same or that they all practice sexism. But there are a few "feminists" who despise men and are best described as feminazis. The furthest end of feminism is represented by feminazis, who believe that women are superior to men. For instance, political activist and radical feminist Sally Miller Gearhart made a declaration in her essay "The Future, If There Is One, Is Female" that "the proportion of men must be decreased to and maintained at around 10% of the human race". This is the extreme kind of feminism because it has never been about subjugating or dominating males; rather, it is about granting everyone the same chances and privileges regardless of gender.



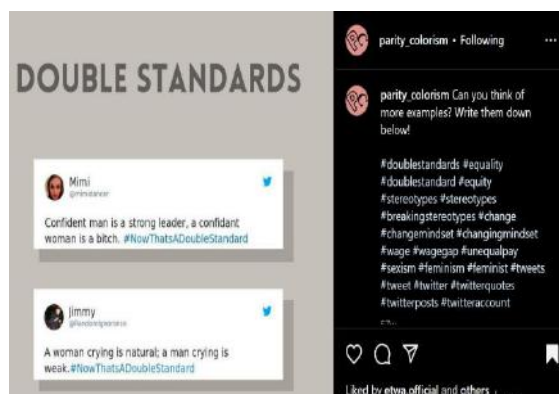
The above X post by Rachel Foster states, "TURN UP THE CHEAT. All women should have an affair in their life - it made me feel sexier AND look younger " is not only a problematic statement but also offensive. Such a statement perpetuates harmful and sexist attitudes towards women and their relationships.

Firstly, the phrase "turn up the cheat" suggests that cheating or being unfaithful in a relationship is acceptable or even desirable. This reinforces the idea that fidelity is not a

crucial aspect of a healthy relationship, which can be damaging to both individuals and the relationship itself. Secondly, the statement implies that all women should have an affair, which is a gross generalization and ignores the diversity of women's experiences and desires. This reinforces the idea that women's sexuality is something that can be controlled and manipulated by external factors or social norms. Thirdly, the phrase "it made me feel sexier and younger again" implies that women's value lies in their youth and sexual attractiveness, which is a sexist and ageist assumption. This reinforces the societal pressure on women to conform to a narrow and unrealistic standard of beauty and femininity. Finally, the statement reflects a power dynamic where men are often seen as the ones who can grant or deny women sexual satisfaction and fulfilment. This reinforces the patriarchal idea that women are passive and dependent on men for their sexual needs. However, there have been instances of false accusations against men, and it seems that feminism is not progressing in the right direction in society. For example, there is a case (<https://youtu.be/Zkkmap7sVnI>; <https://youtu.be/tEa6zvNpOko>) in India where two girls encouraged a group of 25-30 thugs to brutally attack two men over a trivial parking dispute and falsely accused them of molestation. One of the men died as a result, and the other was taken to the intensive care unit. There is also a video (<https://youtu.be/PLvFFywU48A>) circulating on social media of a woman violently assaulting a cab driver in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. The woman claimed that the driver tried to run her over, but surveillance footage showed that the driver was initially speeding and then braked abruptly in front of the woman at a pedestrian crossing. In these cases, the freedoms granted to women under feminism were misused, and the women exploited their gender to garner support and further their own interests. The cab driver was immediately attacked by the public.

VI. CONCLUSION

Culturally constructed gender roles and relationships continue to remain same in both mainstream and social media. Hence a need is suggested for a broader discussion of social media. Social media can be a powerful tool to help remove gender stereotypes by promoting positive representations of diverse gender identities, breaking down stereotypes and increasing acceptance of gender diversity. Sharing content that portrays women and men in a range of roles, highlighting the experiences of individuals who have been impacted by gender stereotypes and that challenges traditional gender norms.



These statements in the above post by parity_colorism suggests that confidence is a desirable trait in men, but when a woman is confident, she is seen as aggressive and unfeminine. This reinforces the idea that men should suppress their emotions, which can have negative effects on their mental health and overall well-being. But such posts on social media can be a useful tool to at least point out such gender stereotypes, raise awareness and spark conversations. Individuals can use social media to share articles, videos, and other resources that promote gender equality and diversity. Social media platforms are a great place to use gender-neutral language. When we use gendered language, we reinforce gender stereotypes. For example, instead of using “he” or “she,” use “they” or “people”. It can be used to promote inclusive practices and policies that support gender diversity. Share information about initiatives, programs, and policies that promote gender equity and inclusivity, and encourage others to support them.

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