

Ladies in Performance: Role of Social Media on Their Work, Identity and Social Perception

Ekroop Kaur Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Sri Guru Granth Sahib World University, Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab, India	Dr. Roop Kamal Kaur Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University College, Chunni Kalan, Punjab, India
--	---

Abstract

The present research paper addresses the manners whereby swift augmentation of social media modified the identity and perception of females performing dance in orchestra. Since the dawn of history, they encounter public humiliation and their art lacks recognition. Nevertheless, the emergence of numerous social websites paves ways for them to exhibit their artistry to broader public devoid of any traditional prohibitions. The aforementioned research emphasises the contribution of social media on work, identity and social perception of female dance artists in orchestra groups in Punjab.

Key Words – Female, Orchestra, Dance Performers and Social Media.

Introduction

Dance and music have been the substantial part of celebration in Punjab. These are not merely fundamental parts of culture but also the prominent forms of income for many people. Both male and female carry out dance as profession from time immemorial to earn a living. But the females have always been in high demand and popularity in the entertainment industry. Traditionally, they were designated as apsaras, devadasis, nautch girls and tawaifs and in present times, people call them danceraan, nachan-waalian and nachaar. In Punjab, they are associated with entertainment groups known as “orchestra groups” and perform at weddings, fairs, festivals and all celebratory occasions. (Mukherji, 1986; Johri, 2016)

Collins Dictionary defines Orchestra as “a large group of musicians who play a variety of different instruments together.” (Collins, 2025)

Thus, it is clarified from the above definition that orchestra is a cluster of male and female dance artists, disk jockeys and musicians who work as a team to entertain people with traditional dance performances like Giddha and Bhangra on contemporary music. The weddings in Punjab are the occasions of pleasure and enjoyment. In bygone days, the wedding caravans of groom stay for 3-4 days in the hometown of bride and spent time by playing cards or visiting farms. The females perform their traditional dance Giddha, which demonstrates the social happenings, sentiments and memoir of masses. The women relieved themselves by portraying their daily narratives and everyday problems. But the culture of ‘marriage palace’ implemented a shift in leisure activities of guests. Initially, the orchestra groups were invited from Delhi and Bombay to amuse the guests on bollywood dance numbers. But they realised that they need to adopt cultural art of Punjab to

establish here. Thus, orchestra is documentation of ethnic heritage of Punjab. The boys and girls from small towns and villages of Punjab join these groups and start earning through professional dancing. The possibilities of work generated by orchestra for females remained unnoticed in academic work. Since the dawn of history, they encounter public humiliation and their art lacks recognition. Nevertheless, the emergence of numerous social websites such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, paves ways for them to exhibit their artistry to broader public devoid of any traditional prohibitions. It adversely affects their social identity as they confront digital trolling and derogatory comments. The visuals of these artists confronting mistreatment on stage are popping up on social media sites. The aforementioned research emphasises the contribution of social media on work, identity and social perception of female dance artists in orchestra groups in Punjab. (Banerji, 1944; Satauj, 2018)

Review of Literature

D'Ison (2006) in her book "Hira Mandi" presents the dilemma of dance artists in the past six decades of Pakistan. Hira Mandi (Diamond Market), Shahi Mohalla (Royal Bazar) and Bazar-E-Husn (The Beauty Market) are some famous streets in which juvenile girls are instructed to learn diverse art genres to earn through family business of singing, dancing and sex work. These girls start performing at the age of eleven and named as golden hens. The bourgeoisie, politicians and elite businessmen from Dubai and Saudi Arab are their clients. these women encounter assault, mistreatment and social disregard.

Ncube (2013) in his article "Dancing with Power: Does Erotic Dancing Empower or Commodify Women" examine the socio-economic variances in Zimbabwe, leading women towards erotic dancing. The erotic dancing was condemned and appreciated at the same time. It was believed that it objectifies women. But on the other hand, people thought that it opposes the patriarchal structure of society. to feel freedom and liberty, women were told to look attractive and perform erotic dancing.

HT Correspondent (2016) in their article "Guns, drunk men and abuse: What wedding dancers face in race for survival" stated that entertainment is not an easy profession for women. The dance artists were compelled to relinquish sexual services to their bosses and agents for good employment opportunities. They face gunshots, car-chasing and threats. Most of them belong to economically weak sections of society and disruptive families. While a few of them work as prostitutes to fulfil their money requirements.

Satauj (2018) in his novel "Naachfarosh" describe about the fascinating world of female orchestra dance performers. Orchestra provides possibilities to earn but also impudence. This novel is a presentation of real-life stories of female dance performers working in orchestra. These artists dislike when people call them danceraan, nachan-waalian and nachaar and ignore their hard work and dedication. Their face character judgement and disrespect. They face harassment from organisers, agents, fellow dance artists and even from their family members. Due to constant work pressure and disturbed life, some of them consume alcohol to relive stress. The life of these artists requires in-depth analysis ad every artist deserves respect.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Theory

Feminism is "the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state," according to the Cambridge Dictionary. The comprehension of gendered relations in the entertainment industry is emphasized by feminist theory. Because of their occupation and living circumstances, women in the entertainment industry are objectified and scrutinized by society. They deal with unequal power dynamics and societal surveillance. The feminist perspective also emphasizes how patriarchy affects how Punjabi female orchestra dance performers are perceived, which eventually leads to their marginalization. (Friedan:1963)

Risk Society

The idea of 'Risk Society' was introduced by 'Ulrich Beck,' who explains that modern business, trade, and labour practices generate new social and occupational hazards. The female dance performers in the orchestra face economic uncertainties from inconsistent job opportunities and health hazards from prolonged movements that demand strength and flexibility. The experiences of these artists emphasize risk management in the absence of institutional protections. (Beck, 1992)

Objectives of Research

1. To understand the role of digital media in professional orchestra dancing.
2. To investigate the identity construction of female artists through digital media.
3. To analyse the social perception of female dance artists.
4. To examine the problems faced by female dance artists.

Research Methodology

The current study has qualities of both qualitative and quantitative research. The information is gathered from both primary and secondary sources. For primary sources, respondents are interviewed personally, while for secondary sources, national and international books, magazines, research papers and newspaper articles are referred. Punjab has been chosen as the primary location. Statistical data detailing the actual count of female dance artists in orchestras in Punjab is unavailable. Thus, a pilot study has been carried out to address this limitation. Amritsar in the Majha region, along with Patiala and Ludhiana in Malwa, and Jalandhar in Doaba region had the highest number of female dance artists. Therefore, areas with the highest concentration of orchestra dance performers have been chosen from Punjab. The snowball sampling method is utilized to obtain data from the participants. In this study, a sample of 50 participants is gathered from across the entire state of Punjab.

Employment Conditions of Female Dance Performers in Orchestra

The employment conditions highlight the essential qualities of work environment of artists. It consists age, educational level, hours at work, employee relations, salary and allowance. These reflects professional situations of dance artists which makes it easy to analyse their circumstances. In this research paper, the factors have been taken into consideration are discussed in this section. Some of the employment conditions are discussed in this section of the paper as follows: -

Age: Age is a prominent element of social research which indicates total number of years an individual lived, since he was born. In wider context it depicts the phase of life of an individual. (Logan, J.R., R. Word & G. Spitze, 1992)

The data show that 21-30 years age group consists of 40 percent artists, 31-40 years age group consists of 36 percent artists and 11-20 years age group consists of 24 percent artists. The findings clarified that females set to work in the age of 11 years and continue before their maturity. The young, beautiful, slim and attractive females are the main requirements of this line of work. The females approaching middle age are rarely desired by organisers as well as audience. It was also found that overweight females are even paid less than others.

Education Level: The education level demonstrates the educational background of a person. It alludes to most advanced level of formal education received by a person. Emile Durkheim reveals that school and education are agencies of socialisation that taught social beings to communicate and interact effectively with others. (Durkheim, 1956)

The data show that 10 percent respondents attained elementary education, succeeded by 24 percent respondents completed primary education, accompanied by 30 percent respondents completed matriculation, 18 percent artists attained senior secondary, 12 percent artists were illiterate and 6 percent artists attained graduation. The research revealed that female dance performers were not highly qualified due to pathetic lives, economic downturn, family discord, absence of opportunities. Through orchestra, they raise money for generating more academic possibilities for their siblings.

Hours at Work: The hours at work reflect the total time an individual engaged at professional work. This research reveals that 3-5 hours are the standard working hours of 56 percent artists and 6-8 hours are the standard working hours of 44 percent artists in orchestra. Thus, it showcases total working hours of female dance performers are not fixed in orchestra. These usually depends upon the necessities of the occasions.

Employee Relations: The employee relations imply the kind of communication and connection between employer and their workers. The research emphasized that mixed form of relations exists in orchestra. Some organisers pay wages on time whereas others skip payments. There are some organisers who keep money showered by audience in their pockets and do not share with the artists. Some organisers help artists during problematic situations on and off stage. Thus, mixed type of responses was received from respondents.

Salary and Allowance: Salary means prescribed amount of money paid monthly and allowances means money paid for travel, expenses and daily requirements. The salary of female dance artists was unfixed because orchestra is not a salaried job. The artists received wages depending upon the number of shows they perform daily. It is not feasible to calculate the monthly salary of employees. There were no allowances provided to artists in orchestra which depicts informal status of their employment. They manage their travel expenses, expenses of their costumes and

makeup on their own. They have no health insurance provided by their employers. Even if they got sick or had some accident during their performance, they manage their health care costs on their own irrespective of a few dance artists who claimed that organisers had helped them.

Utilisation of Digital Media Platforms and Work Opportunities

The digital media platforms provide opportunities to display talent and ability to wider audience. The fame of artists on social media influences their job opportunities. The well-known artists on social media platforms got more work chances because of visibility of their popularity. There are numerous platforms for exhibiting art and few of them are discussed in Table 1

Table – 1 Distribution of Respondents According to Usage of Social Media Platforms

S. No.	Social Media Platforms	Frequency	Percentage
1	Instagram	21	42
2	Facebook	11	22
3	Not using	7	14
4	Any other	6	12
5	YouTube	5	10
	Total	50	100

Source: Primary Data

The above table highlights that Instagram and Facebook are the frequently used social media platforms by respondents. However, YouTube and other social media platforms such as: Snapchat, Josh, Mitron, Moj and Chingari are also been used by them. These platforms not only enhance their visibility but also connects them with organisers beyond local boundaries. It helps them gaining work in the competitive informal sector of employment. In the era of technological advancement, 14 percent respondents were not using any social media platform to post the dance videos and networking with people. They fear online harassment and wanted to prevent their anonymous status due to fear of recognition and labelling by society. However, the online videos usually exaggerated and magnified the physical appearance of artists rather than their dance skills, highlighting the feminist perspective of objectification of women through male gaze. Also, dancing women are working in precarious environment and posting their routine lives may add 'Manufactured Risks' on their privacy and safety as discussed by 'Beck' in 'Risk society.' (Beck, 1992)

Social media makes it easy for audience, organisers and clients to directly contact the artists for shows. But still, some respondents believed that work opportunities rely solely on personal networking with local agents. To get a clear picture, respondents were asked about generation of work opportunities by social media and their responses are given in Table - 2

Table –2 Distribution of Respondents According to Generation of Work Opportunities by Social Media Platforms

S. No.	Generation of Work Opportunities by Social Media Platforms	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	34	68
2	No	9	18
3	Sometimes	7	14
	Total	50	100

Source: Primary Data

The above table clarifies that 68 percent respondents believed that social media always generates work opportunities, 18 percent respondents believed that social media never generates work opportunities and 14 percent respondents believed that social media sometimes generates work opportunities. The 68 percent artists were interviewed further to know about the earnings through social media and the findings are discussed in Table 2.1.

Table – 2.1 Distribution of Respondents According to Earnings Through Social Media

S. No.	Earnings through Social Media	Frequency	Percentage
1	Online Bookings for Show	27	66
2	Promotion	12	30
3	Collaborations	2	4
	Total	41	100

Source: Primary Data

The above table clarifies that 66 percent respondents get online bookings for the show through social media; 30 percent respondents get promotion which ultimately affects in employment generation and only 4 percent respondents get sponsorships and collaborations on social media, for which they are paid good amount. They receive fundings for promoting the products or small businesses. Thus, social media plays a crucial role in generating income as well as job possibilities.

Construction of Identity through Social Media

The identity of an individual reflects her nature, qualities and characteristics. It is constructed through the impression of their personality in society which is determined by social circumstances, culture and public role performed by them. In recent years, the digital life of people also impacts their individuality. The public persona of people is shaped by the social media now-a-days because it not only provides growth opportunities but also subject them towards the

public investigation and cyber exploitation. The female dance performers are in multifarious state as they receive job options through social media but also suffer from societal judgements, online harassment and abuse. The videos available on these platforms often influence their societal interpretation and identity formation. (Patki, 2023) To get a clearer picture, the role of social media in shaping identity of female orchestra dance artists is discussed below in Table – 3

Table 3 Distribution of Respondents According Construction of Identity through Social Media

S. No.	Construction of Identity through Social Media	Frequency	Percentage
1	Objectification	22	44
2	Recognisability	18	36
3	Social Judgements	6	12
4	No Impact	4	8
	Total	50	100

Source: Primary Data

The above table highlights that 44 percent artists faced objectification; 36 percent artists claimed that social media provides them recognisability; 12 percent artists faced societal judgements and only 8 percent artists claimed that social media has no impact on their life. Thus, most of the dance artists face constant objectification and judgements. Dancing is seen as disreputable profession due to which the artists working in this especially female face constant condemnation from society. The abusive comments written beneath their posts often sabotage their personal as well as professional identity. When respondents were asked about the abusive comments, their responses are highlighted in Table – 4

Table – 4 Distribution of Respondents According to the Abusive Comments

S.no.	Abusive Comments	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	45	90
2	No	5	10
	Total	50	100

Source: Primary Data

Thus, it is clear that maximum female artists, revealed about abusive comments written under their social media posts. There are some evil-minded people who harasses them openly while performing on stage, resting in changing rooms and chasing their cars after the show. People make immoral demands to them both online and personally. Such gestures of public result into reputational loss. The orchestra dance artists claimed that they hate the word ‘dancer,’ ‘danceraan’ or ‘nachan-waalian.’ They feel proud in naming themselves as professional dance artists or entertainers. They are trying to earn a respectable livelihood and trying to fulfil the needs of their family. There are very few girls who joined the orchestra groups as their hobby, whereas

most of them joined it due to poverty, sick parents, druggist brother or abusive husband and other personal reasons. In this profession, they earn a lot of money but very less respect. The platform which makes them able to represent themselves deepens the prejudice. It creates a tension between formation of self and perception of society about female dance artists. (Mukherji, 1986)

Societal Perception of Female Dance Performers

Being a woman in the entertainment industry, particularly in dance, is quite challenging. The moment an orchestra dance artist appears on stage, the gazes of all focus on various aspects of her physique. The female dance artists live in ongoing fear of gunfire. They alter their outfits behind the drapes where individuals find reasons to slip in. No one is worried about the safety and food of these women. They journey to distant and unfamiliar locations for the performances without any protection. Social media is crowded with videos of individuals improperly climbing on stage to capture inappropriate footage of performers. The audience makes vulgar comments and even trails the vehicles of performers after the event. The female dance artists face disrespect and humiliation.

Kulwinder Kaur, a 23-year-old dance performer with an orchestra, was killed in a shooting at a wedding in Maur Mandi. While she was on stage performing, a drunken man unexpectedly shot a celebratory bullet, which struck her in the head. The dancer passed away at the scene. She was dragged off the stage and her body was left outside the wedding hall. An ambulance was summoned to transport her deceased body. The priest carried on with the marriage ceremonies within the wedding hall. This was an incredibly cruel behaviour exhibited by individuals towards the dance performer. The government, the police force, the proprietor of the wedding venue and the relatives of the accused began to hold one another responsible. Kulwinder Kaur's parents were approached with a financial incentive to withdraw their case against the suspect. The media drew parallels between this case and the Jessica Lal case, involving a barmaid who was murdered after she declined a drink request from a customer post-bar closing hours. The condition of women in the entertainment sector as dance performers in bars and as bar staff is quite poor. (Sharma, 2017)

Nowadays, parents prioritize their children's academic achievements over instilling moral values in them. They fail to instil positive values in their children, particularly in boys. Parents and educational institutions overlook that the primary goal of education is the holistic growth of a child, rather than merely achieving high marks in assessments. Consequently, sociological evaluation of these events explores the effectiveness and nuances of social media. While social media allows artists to connect with their community and boost their success, it also exposes them to criticism, ethical scrutiny, trolling, and character assassination.

An additional aspect of female orchestra dance artists is important to address. Certain deliberately provocative videos of these artists are circulating online, emphasizing specific body parts and dance moves to draw male interest. Such videos are a blatant distortion of Punjab's culture and heritage. Due to these explicit videos, the diligent, committed, and skilled artists are perceived by society in the same way, which impacts their integrity. This diminishes the identity of women in orchestra as dance performers and also impacts their social status and reputation. In today's technological age, recording and sharing inappropriate content is quite simple. The society clarifies that such videos serve as entertainment, showcasing the patriarchal system,

NWISA JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY

A Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal ISSN Number 3048-6963 (Online)

Volume 2 Oct 2025

gendered power dynamics, insecurity and the moral decline of society. The lack of response from society to such content normalizes the rude behaviour within society, raising concerns about the safety and dignity of working women.

Conclusion

The above research paper highlighted the importance of social media in promoting art and constructing the identity of female dance artists. It concludes that the attitude of society towards the profession of orchestra remain strict and criticising. Thus, to improve the status of female dance artists there is a need to formalise the profession, moral training of society and improve working conditions of women in the entertainment sector.

References

Ambrosio, N. (1994). *An introduction to dance as an art form and entertainment*. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.

Banerji, P. (1959). *The folk dance of India*. Kitabistan.

Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. Sage Publications.

Collins Dictionary. (2025). *Caste*. Retrieved December 11, 2023, from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/caste>

Collins Dictionary. (2025). *Orchestra*. Retrieved August 16, 2025, from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/orchestra>

De Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The second sex*. Vintage Books.

Desai, N., & Krishan, R. (1987). *Women and society in India*. Ajanta Publishers.

D'Ision, C. L. T. (2006). *Hira Mandi*. Roli Books Pvt. Ltd.

Durkheim, E. (1956). *Education and sociology*. Free Press.

Friedan, B. (1963). *The feminine mystique*. W. W. Norton & Company.

HT Correspondents. (2016). Guns, drunk men and abuse: What wedding dancers face in race for survival. *Hindustan Times*. Retrieved May 7, 2019, from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/guns-drunk-men-and-abuse-what-wedding-dancers-face-in-race-for-survival/story-R3nkj0awRKLjYiBT46Rx9L.html>

Johri, A. D. (2016). Wedding entertainment industry: Behind the gloss, risks of a dancer. *The Indian Express*. Retrieved May 7, 2019, from <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/wedding-entertainment-industry-dancers-dance-sonia-dance-4432632/>

Logan, J. R., Ward, R., & Spitze, G. (1992). As old as you feel: Age identity in middle and later life. *Sociological Forces*, 71. Retrieved August 21, 2025, from

NWISA JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY

A Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal ISSN Number 3048-6963 (Online)
Volume 2 Oct 2025

<https://www.periodicos.capes.gov.br/index.php/acervo/buscaador.html?task=detalhes&id=W4253863649>

Mukherji, S. K. (1986). *Prostitution in India*. Das Gupta & Co.

Ncube, G. (2013). Dancing with power: Does erotic dancing empower or commodify women?

Retrieved August 16, 2020, from

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271440557_Dancing_with_Power_Does_Erotic_Dancing_Empower_or_Commodify_Women

Oxford English Dictionary. (1894). *Dancer*. Retrieved May 22, 2025, from

https://www.oed.com/dictionary/dancer_n

Oxford Reference. (2025). Retrieved December 14, 2024, from

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100515618>

Patki, S. (2023). Social media and self-identity: Examining the effects of online self-presentation on individual identity construction. Retrieved April 27, 2026, from

<https://www.flame.edu.in/in-the-media/social-media-and-self-identity-examining-the-effects-of-online-self-presentation-on-individual-identity-construction>

Satauj, P. S. (2018). *Naachfarosh*. Caliber Publications.

Sharma, B. (2017). What made two men shoot a 23-year-old wedding dancer dead in Bathinda last year. *HuffPost India*. Retrieved July 26, from

https://www.huffpost.com/archive/in/entry/what-made-two-men-shoot-a-23-year-old-wedding-dancer-dead-in-bha_in_5c11f927e4b003d830eb3dad