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**Social Media in Pakistan: Eliminating or Consolidating Gender Barriers?**

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**Abstract:**

Facebook has lately grown in popularity among Pakistanis who are young, technologically savvy, and primarily urban. Users on such social networking sites have the ability to express themselves through nicknames, pictures, and themes of their choosing. In this paper, the researcher analyzed how Pakistani Facebook users use such resources to build their identities. The researcher used qualitative research method for the purpose of analysis. The researcher conducted interview from 30 active facebook users. The findings demonstrated that Facebook has a substantial influence on the socio-cultural and linguistic norms of discourse in Pakistan, allowing women to question existing communication patterns while simultaneously reinforcing conventional gender stereotypes.

**INTRODUCTION**

Gender identification applies to an individual's self-conception Part of a specific demographic is firmly widely accepted in Women's and men's expectations (PAIK, 2013). Online and face-to-face gender identities can be created in contact. A feeling of liberation from online identities is affected by physical limits and building human capacity. Facebook Status Changes appear to give pretty vague details regarding the users' definitions and party affiliations, (Bowler, 2020) have shown. Similarly, Eisenlauer (2013) noticed that Facebook users utilize text automation to reduce discursive self-positioning. Unlike penned texts that fear being viewed as very uncomplicated and blatant identity performances, Facebook users may assert different facets of identity more implicitly through software-generated books, such as those shared in status updates (Eisenlauer,

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2013). This paper will discuss if the consequences for online gender identities of the above results are also relevant.

While interest in the study of online contact trends has increased, researchers believe more studies are needed to investigate contact between social networking networks such as Facebook (Thompson & Lougheed, 2012). Most studies have also been performed in this area is not East and Arab but West communities. Therefore, this thesis seeks to resolve this disparity by expanding literature on the gaps in the gender of social networking in culture. The research would also look at the construction of young adults. Their gender orientation is expressed in past studies' findings and gender-sensitive linguistic hypotheses on the most popular social network platform, Facebook.

In every nation, over 500 000 users in 70 languages use Facebook as a social networking platform. Adult people utilize Facebook for many reasons. The study of psychologists and sociologists indicates that people use social network platforms such as socializing with their colleagues and peers for a range of purposes. According to socialists, it is also used for "informal study," self-expression, and the formation and teaching in personality that takes place in teenage development. Facebook also acts as a tool for political engagement and media interaction (Collier & Maggid, 2010).

As social networking platforms are becoming more popular, consumers invest more time on Facebook and become more active as their Mobile Smartphone is accessible to search for when away from the device. As time spent on social networking platforms grows, their encounters with people offline begin to decline, implying that much of their socialization and socialization occurs in the shimmer of a computer or phone frame. A possible result of the expanded time for online engagement is that personality development and self-comprehension is now more influenced (Ganda, 2014).

In recent years, Facebook has increased in size, encouraging people to build lists of persons they meet and to exchange notes, images, and other information. Yet as social networking platforms have grown and grown the popularity, and consumers of these platforms have switched from existence to more social ties. The Facebook website of DiMicco & Millen 2007 is very popular with college students.

Gender identity is conceptualized and ordinary as a personal identity formed by social standards. According to Young (2013), the Philosophy of Identity and Social Identity is "the social essence of self-defined by its place in the community and discusses the idea of various identities to explain human values and functions. These two hypotheses vary in that Identity Theory attempts to describe 'job identity' like an employee, a partner, a mother, a girlfriend, a friend, and a colleague.

In this study, a narrative method is used to examine how users perform self-presentation on social network platforms. When they sign up for Facebook and the forms of self-expression, they perform personal experiences and relationships on the platform. The researcher also investigated the connections between Facebook users' online and offline personalities, whether male or female.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Before this, research emphasized the value of recognizing how media representations influence gender concepts and has also concentrated on digital media such as social networking platforms.

The photographs used in traditional media have often been linked to existing gender roles used on social media (Rosenberg, 2011).

Today, information and networking systems have made tremendous change through significant technical and software advances. Facebook is one of the most popular social networking platforms. Mark Zuckerberg and his co-founders Dustin Moskovitz, Chris Hughes and Eduardo Saver developed and launched the 2004 Facebook. Facebook was initially developed as an annual online book for students at Harvard University from Mark Zuckerberg (HILLSTROM, 2010). The use of this application has dramatically increased and attracted audiences from other educational institutions. With 70 languages available now, Facebook has been one of the most popular and viewed social networking sites.

Not only are women more involved in Facebook and print administration, but Facebook may also, in a way, be viewed as a "playground" for the success of gender (Paasonen, 2002). Paasonen (2002) claimed that gender is the requirement for thought and living and that there are no essential discrepancies in online contact and offline contact such that "gendering" cannot be done differently on the internet. Goffman (1976) concluded that gender identity is formed by social contact — individuals are inclined to conform to social standards and cultural expectations in ways consistent and appropriate. According to Rose and her colleagues (2012), "Gender show is characterised by culture as a continuous communication medium and articulated by experiences by individuals in creating changing social attitudes concerning gender" (p. 589). As an online media network, Facebook gives users the ability to view themselves and mark themselves as men or women. Some have argued that the critical reason for young adults to link others on Facebook is the display of self-identity and influence (Seidman, 2013).

According to Rudman and Phelan (2010), sex perceptions may be formed through sex stereotypes or implicit self-concepts. The unconscious gender roles contribute to subconscious comparisons between men and women and resulting characteristics, functions and skills. These standards are learnt at a very early level, but the development and execution of these gender stereotypes are achieved without 'context or active comprehension' (Rudman & Phelan 2010, p. 193). On the other hand, self-concepts are interested in automatic associations of the self and the corresponding qualities. Rudman and Phelan (2010) found out that tacit values are considerably more stable than their open counterparts. Thus, priming effects and scenario triggers may have a significant impact on the unconscious expectations and assumptions about sex that are profoundly ingrained in our society. E.g., if women are stereotyped by TV commercials, women's implicit biases are reinforced (Rudman and Phelan, 2010).

Simon and Hoyt (2012) examined this notion further, exploring the effect of women's leadership ambitions and women's influence expectations on gender media. The study notes that "the normal susceptibility of men and women to images of men engaging in stereotypical gender media activities tends to preserve and improve gender stereotypes" he finds that women who report more untraditional gender roles in counter-stereotypical roles. Similarly, when these photos were taken before a leadership task, women displayed "few pessimistic self-perceptions and higher goals" (Simon & Hoyt, 2012, page 241). The convergence of views towards women and men became more evident when contemplating the omnipresence of today's media, in particular, the rise of the Internet and social networking platforms.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The social identity theory is used in this study. Social identification is first and foremost a name or a tag; a means to tie together many individuals based on such similar features. However, in addition to naming, social identification has far other consequences, both for individuals seeking social identity and for those seeing them as representatives of different groups. The name of the genre may, therefore in a certain way be treated as the basis for a painting abundant in cognitive values, subjective comparisons and behavioural effects (DURANTE, 2011).

Media content has been the most significant source of collective identity creation, the immersive mechanism and, on the other hand, forms the process of communicating, creating human identity too. As the theory of intergroup connections was evaluated and established, Tajfel and Turner and others extended the focus to include motives for social identity, relational impact on group buildings and individual social identification processes. In the period, a great deal of study has also been undertaken to deepen the perception of social self-classification (BURKE, 2010).

## **HOW DO MALES OR FEMALES CONSTRUCT GENDER IDENTITIES ON FACEBOOK?**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Several study design methodologies were considered before settling on qualitative analysis via in-depth interviews. While previous research has used empirical designs such as surveys and observational studies, the limitations of these methodologies made them unsuitable for this study. Surveys are a well-known approach for gathering representative data from a wide sample of people on factual topics. However, when it comes to more personal issues like identity formation and self-concept, most of this behaviour is subconscious and necessitates in-depth investigation. Qualitative research is best appropriate for properly assessing the real reasons of Facebook user activity.

"Qualitative approaches are particularly beneficial for illuminating the complex symbolic world that underpins wants, desires, meanings, and choice," says Kozinets (Kozinets, 2002). As a result, the issue of this study falls under the purview of qualitative research. Interviews include direct contact with users and are more likely to be personable as well as productive when performed in a pleasant atmosphere (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2007). Qualitative research is not confined to variables that are formally specified. Thus, qualitative research adds to inquiry research by allowing for the study of new fields of research and the development of new hypotheses. The thirty active facebook users are selected for this study.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

Online interviews were used to investigate people's offline lives and how they reflect on the construction of their identities. Gender was one of the powerful characteristics that shaped how participants perceived and communicated their identities on Facebook. Male and female participants in this study reported varied forms of Facebook usage and had substantially different online representations of themselves. Our method was based on participants' descriptions of identity representation obtained via a one-hour online interview and throughout a six-month period of Facebook use, as well as a thematic analysis of data contents. Digital identity is a dynamic process that includes self-presentation, the usage and display of photographs, and visual material. The instruments that people employ to exhibit and convey their identities were given special

consideration. Gender-based societal stereotypes put significant constraints on women in a male-dominated culture. Regardless of the socio-political rejection of Western values and culture, components of globalisation and Western influence permeate Pakistani society through the Internet and migration to foreign nations. Western discourse has become somewhat accessible as a result of the Internet/social media and viewpoints on the context of the West through imagination or real visit. The encounter with contrasts between local and global cultures has a significant influence on female people. According to the explanation, males have also been influenced and participated in experiencing and dealing with inconsistencies and societal prejudices. The coherence of the individuals' Facebook activity and online interview data revealed certain key themes, which are described below.

In Pakistani society, social factors such as (1) focusing the difference between the sexes due to biological distinctions, (2) keeping them communally apart to avoid the generation of unwanted human connection among them and the resulting serious impacts, and (3) considering men to be both physiologically and psychologically superior to women, which leads to discrimination in career allocation, all influence the formation of stereotypes about men and women.

According to our findings, conservatism and preserving face motivate participants to disregard the status of Facebook and state that they do not wish to spend too much in it. The more conservative participants were more concerned with academic use of Facebook and developing connections with friends than with their readiness to address the socio-cultural implications of social media and forbidden issues. Some of our participants agreed that, no matter how honest they try to be in building their online personas, they cannot present every facet of their lives in cyberspace. We regarded this mode of identity presentation as self-censorship intended to attain social or personal benefits, as users may believe they are being watched by others on social media. Through the interview, we discovered that our participants' gender and level of conservatism had an impact on the compatibility of their online and real identities. In a male-dominated culture, there is a contradiction between what is projected as human rights toward granting women equal access as citizens and more conventional understandings of women's role and position. Men are caught in their positions as being regarded more powerful and intelligent in the family, as well as being expected to financially support their wife and family, much as women are trapped in socio-cultural rules that teach them on how to appear and behave. Although males should be modest in their treatment of women in general, it is women's obligation to first lessen "tension" and be socio-culturally competent.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This study shows Facebook is an important place to negotiate your identity and transcend various social and cultural constraints in your offline lives and to provide people with an ability to present an idealised online picture. Facebook gives the two genders modern immersive avenues to develop, practise and behave differently from offline realities. The same theoretical background may be used to examine the impact of changes in an online activity on the offline lives of Pakistanis in a follow-up study. E.g., Pakistani women may switch from being involved in online political talks to bring more offline and actively involved. Research has also shown that Facebook promotes interaction and exchange among different sexes (cross-gender communication).

This study has shown the value of the resources acquired by social media usage through a sample of Pakistanis and their relation with their everyday lives and activities. To explore how these specific Pakistanis, live in a patriarchal setting, gender success was analysed on Facebook using the instruments offered by the Facebook platform to establish and display their identities online. Facebook has shown research participants a secure space in which some of the psychological and cultural barriers of their physical life can be overcome. Facebook often invites citizens, especially women, to take part in various activities in which they can analyse, update and share their personal views in the public or semi-public domain regarding local and global affairs. In contrast, participants from all genders, though mostly women, found Facebook a supporting forum for reforming gender norms and introducing new performances. Facebook is also a means to share opinions and perspectives and to shape relationships. The internet has succeeded in opening up multiple possibilities for all genders to connect, regardless of their families, customs and religious limitations. Men and women could virtually interact through the internet and social networking sites, maintaining their physical separation. To some point, this new contact tool will overturn the gender gap. The use of virtual relations as a substitute for face-to-face experiences and contact between men and women is debatable as it may often be called immoral. The general value of Facebook is that it becomes a forum for people to create fictional representations of themselves that vary from their actual offline self and are exempt from social and cultural norms. Pakistani participants use this technology to build and reconstruct the society and the culture around them in the way they would want it to be and adapt it to their own lives.

Future research may also analyse this issue to identify whether it can contribute to the breakdown of gender barriers in the longer term. The analysis may also be expanded to investigate how other Pakistani groups with multiple socio-demographic profiles utilise Facebook.

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