

## Exploring Linguistic Representation of Women on Facebook: A Study in Pakistani Context

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### ABSTRACT

Facebook is an online platform where people form a self-presentation and construct an identity through a personal ID or profile. Use of this social website fully depicts the norms and perceptions of patriarchal society. This study aims to explore the way men of society speak to the women as well as the speaking of women with other women that reflects an idea of women in Pakistani society on Facebook through quantitative study. The analysis revealed that the women, in Pakistani society in particular and elsewhere in general is linguistically expressed as a being that is not equal to men in intellect, bodily strength, wisdom, knowledge, forbearance and bravery thus dubbed as timid, weak, sexy, fool, cute hot and so on by society as a whole.

### INTRODUCTION

In modern era, social media is a source of interaction among people where they exchange information and ideas. Smart phones, Tablets and web-based technologies have transformed world into worldwide town where people and groups share and talk about their thoughts regarding many issues (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Pakistan is no exception from that situation; Social media, specifically Facebook is use of millions of people in Pakistan.

Words of any dialect are not inherently great or awful but rather they have a tendency to mirror discrete and general values. It is through which Pakistani men, talks about their counterpart, and the way women do speak with their co-sexual individuals reflects thought they possess in refer to ladies. Usually, harsh comments do represent to allure ladies. Internet-based life has number of ads, gender-based posts, remarks and related images which unmistakably reflects such dispositions of men to their counterpart, women and of women to women as being equal gender to overall society in general. Use of language by and large shows minimizing practices towards ladies in the public eye (James Broad Bridge, 2013). To see this, think about how sex connects

with different parts of individual character. (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003).

Beauvoir (1989) rightly said about such situation that it is natural to be born as a male or a female; therefore, it is further society which shapes it accordingly and the society which creates their mentality according to their gender. While, as far the natural demarcation to be either a male or female depends on their reproductive capacities which one possesses; the roles of gender as well as its representation are being a societal construct. Current study aims to highlight the female identity construction and linguistic representation of women on Facebook in context of Pakistan.

The concern of current study therefore explores the way how women are being linguistically depicted on social media, especially, Facebook. It has focused ultimately to the Pakistani society, where people as whole are of different approaches and possesses different mentality that voices their insight feelings and also expresses the mass better through linguistically by social media likewise; social networking sites have become an essential part for a majority of the people around the globe. Facebook in particular, with its huge number of active users, has become the central place for

people to “learn what their friends are doing, whom they’re dating, and even what [music] they’re listening to” (Parr, 2011). More importantly, it is the largest social network with over 800 million active users (Parr, 2011). As by Gearhart & Kang (2010) illustrated, the authors of social networking profile “actively use their profiles for personal identity expression” (p. 16). Furthermore, because users have the “luxury of time” (Bobkowski, 2008, p. 6) when constructing their online identity to know others through social networking sites.

### Site of the Study

Since the dawn of civilization, it has been observed that women are not considered equal to men and till now it has been like. Likewise, the society of Pakistanis by nature a patriarchal, which does problematizes issue which reflects gender inequality in society. The result, women are considered as oppressive and they do have hidden identities which they usually receive from side of oppressors.

### Research Problem of the Study

The fact that language is an active tool to marginalize the gender, race, culture is ignored at its best. People consider language merely a mean of transmitting messages without considering the fact that it is a bearer of ideology, culture or also helps in forming stereotypes and construction of identities.

### Aims & Objectives

The study aims to explore the ways in which women are linguistically represented on Facebook in Pakistani society. The study does not only focus the linguistics expressions of men about women but also women’s expressions about other women.

### Objectives of the Study are as Follow,

1. To study the linguistic attributes used for women
2. To investigate the signs of marginalization against women.
3. To highlight language used in representing women showing sexism and misogyny.

### Research Questions of Study

Study had these research questions

1. What kind of language is used to refer to women on Facebook?
2. Does the language show signs of marginalization against women on Facebook?
3. Does the language used in representing women show sexism and misogyny on Facebook?

### Significance of the Study

Modern day world has its everything related to computer, internet, and social networking. Thus, it has penetrated into the social life as well so its impertinent to study social as-

pects effecting and being affecting with the use of internet and social websites especially Facebook. Social network increasing long range interpersonal communication’s expanding prominence among both youth and grown-ups makes it a territory worth concentrate to discover examples of human conduct and correspondence.

This study is therefore taken to analyse the ways in which women is treated on Facebook linguistically in context of Pakistani society. In order to see how patriarchy and male dominance persists itself in the new virtual world of social networking.

### Review of the Literature

The gender representation needs to be assessed with number of ways in social media services, especially, Facebook. For that, it is necessary to be familiarised with previous literature that highlights the concept of relation between languages to gender, this shall accompany section of critical discourse analysis on linguistic representation of women at different forums. The discussion of some primary theories that are reflecting this topic later assists to form even more understanding to significance related to language within creation of meanings. Thus, these theories that show connection of language and gender, patriarchy and feminism, and representation on social networking on online identity construction in the following sections are discussed.

### Gender and Language Connection

The specific purpose of this paper is to analyse the portrayal of women on facebook in connection with gender and language theories. Litosseliti and Sunderland (2002: 4) shed the light on the issue of language and gender in two terms; firstly gender dominance and secondly gender differences. According to these two theoreticians, gender dominance can also be illustrated to as male dominance which can be influenced through three ways:

- a. Women had no consideration in grammatical use such as words like chairman etc ignore the presence of women in office.
- b. Women were also used to be presented as stereotypical and trivial manner in Lexical items. For example; blonde etc.
- c. Similarly, lexical terms are also degrading towards women. e.g bitch.

According to another language theory He/Man approach (Thorne et al.1983, p. 25) language plays a sexist role in usage of words related to men more than the words related to women. The gender dominance theory or He/Man approach implies the sexist usage of language that may be gender biased, that paved the way of language and gender theories in gender studies. However, Litosseliti and Sunderland (2002) emphasised that the notion of sexist language has demolished in last 2 decades during the past two decades after the realization that any specific word considered or taken as sexist or offensive might be reclaimed by a given speech community and in turn, gender-neutral words could be used as sexist. Litosseliti and Sunderland (2002) also pointed out

that primary importance of interpretation of words and their meanings in the context and the identification of 'sexist' words somehow received a chance to form people's thought and hence, gender dominance creates gender representations through language. The theory of gender differences implies that the way we speak is determined by our gender (Litosseliti and Sunderland, 2002). However, the major downfall of this theory is that it does not encompass transgender people and their language identity in it. Though these theories and approaches can be insufficient, but at some extent they contribute towards the dimensions of research in language and gender. Thus, they can be useful as main approaches of language and gender theories in current study research as well, although context has to also be taken into consideration.

### Representations and Identities

Portrayal characters are made digressively. Semantic decisions influence the manners by which a specific portrayal is made in an explicit setting. Along these lines the primary object of talks is to frame portrayals (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen, 2009, p.77).

As per basic notion of critical discourse analysis (CDA), its social ideologies that form or portray the representation of individuals. These ideologies are believed to transform individuals' thoughts, behaviours and beliefs and hence, some way or other affect the same as well in process of transformation. These Social ideologies may be apparent in our discourse (spoken as well as written) as lexical and grammatical choices. This identifies that through our usage of language, we display a representation of any specific social ideology. It is sometime difficult for language users to even notice the social ideologies behind their choice of words. Ultimately, it is important to realize the possible ideologies and relations created through our usage of words and language. This sense of realization and recognition makes it possible to shape one's language use to form new representations of people. Therefore, language can be considered as both influential, and a product of our society and social formation (Fairclough, 1997; Salomaa, 2010). According to Fairclough (1997), what is left unsaid is also as important as the actual contents of a text which is also an essential part of critical discourse studies. In order to analyse or determine what is not said, there are three main categories one should analyse when determining the representations and identities in a given text. Fairclough (1997) illustrates these categories as a), the ideational function that determines and represents certain social ideologies, acts or belief systems, b) The interpersonal functions that construct or formulate the identities and social relationships in society, c) Textual function, that depicts the connection between the writer and the reader of any specific text, it may either be formal or informal.

### Feminism and Patriarchy

In patriarchal society, feminist identity is by its very nature problematic, since feminism as a movement, in its most basic definition, seeks to create equity and equality for women by uprooting systematic oppression. However, the movement has undergone many changes and iterations since its expansion

in the second wave feminism of the 1970s, and there are many varying definitions and expectations of what it means to be a feminist. In her review of feminist perspectives that have been influential in language and gender research, Mary Bucholtz (2014) defines feminism as "a diverse and sometimes conflicting set of theoretical, methodological, and political perspectives that have in common a commitment to understanding and challenging social inequalities related to gender and sexuality" (p. 23). The view of feminism as "challenging social inequalities" is particularly important to historical definitions of feminism, and this view is shared by many feminist researchers in a socio cultural linguistics as well, as both a direction and a purpose for sociolinguistic scholarship. For instance, Mary Talbot (2010), who researches language and gender and the construction of gender in teenage magazines, defines feminism as "*a form of politics dedicated to bringing about social changes, and ultimately to arresting the reproduction of systematic inequalities between men and women*".

### Research Methodology

Quantitative research methodology will be used as a part of the present research. As per Creswell (2013), a quantitative investigation refers to a procedure used to understand the social or human issue in more depth by getting ideas of other people. It takes words and meanings into account besides focus on interpretations.

Sampling is the way in which the research chooses a sample from a larger population for collection of the data (Kumar, 2012). Participants were invited to answer questionnaire voluntarily and before the participant was given questionnaire, the researcher briefed the participant about the topic and told them to refrain from answering the question that she did not want to answer and assured of confidentiality of participation.

This study used questionnaire as a research instrument. The questionnaire consisted of closed and open ended questionnaire in order to get the diverse views of participants regarding the topic. In present study, purposive sampling was used to choose the participants for filling questionnaire. The participants of the present study were Facebook users ( $n=100$ ) including both male and female aged between 18-35. In research, questions in questionnaire were chosen in order to know how women are being linguistically represented on Facebook. The researcher invited some college and university students to this study for filling questionnaire and got opportunity to participate. Those users who showed interest in participating were given questionnaires. Questionnaire with samples satirical and stereotypical language used were also chosen and analyzed in order to see how language is used as a tool to linguistically marginalize women.

### FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The procedure of data was followed to find responses of research questions present in study. The data collected helped to even explore more about men as well as women that have equally made to marginalize and the show of stereotypical language referred to women. This all underlies about

stereotypical behaviors which women do have unequal representation with respect to men. These men are source of troublemakers for them.

Figure 1 depicts the gender of participants. Total 150 participants were chosen for this study including male and female. The figure shows that 53% of the participants were male and 47% were female. This number of participants was opted in order to have satisfied responses from both male and female sides. However, everyone has its different kind of opinion, but results are made in accordance of authenticity. It was observed that men and women are in same boat in pointing out other women only.

Figure 2 is the description of the age of the participants which according to figure 2 is between 18 to 35. 60% of the participants were aged between 18 to 25, whereas, 33% are in age of 26 to 30 years while 7% fall in between 31 to 35 years

Researcher asked participants in questionnaire that if they are aware of using Facebook than to fill questionnaire or provide them to fill but incredible replies were there. There are 60% percent students were regular users of Facebook while 17% were unaware of using Facebook. Moreover, 23% were using in rare cases. According to (Aygül, 2010: 95). Facebook users are free to enjoy chatting and making new friends. They exchange their culture and traditions and share their ideas. According to findings of research, most of the people are attached

Researcher asked in question paper which resource students used for using Facebook more. As a result Majority of the students used Facebook on their android phones. Moreover 23 percent were using on their laptops and minority students were using other resources. Actually, they find android very easy as compare to other sources. (Plant, 2000),

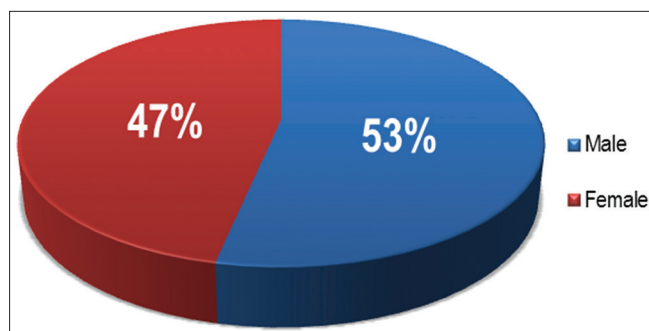


Figure 1. Gender

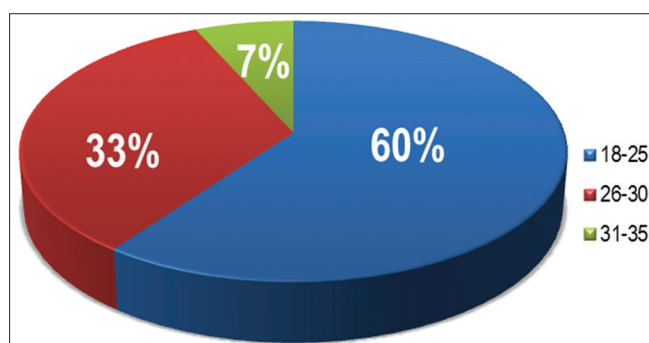
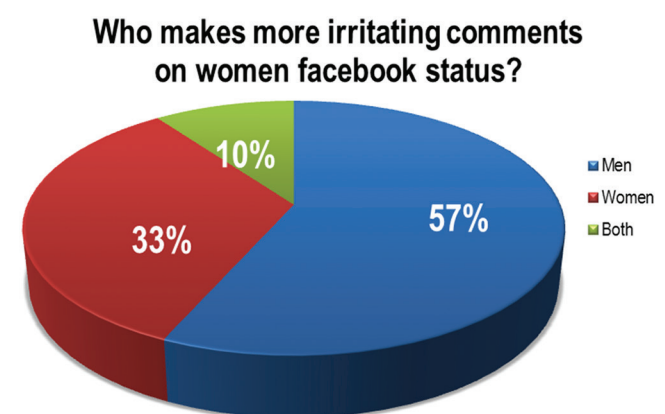


Figure 2. Age

However, rather than destabilizing gender. In nutshell, researcher can assume that majority of people use android phones while running Facebook.

Another question related to Facebook was asked that how much time they spend on Facebook. In response researcher got 47% were using more than an hour. Moreover, 33% use Less than an hour while 20% spend time between 4 to 5 hours. In brief majority of the students well known about Facebook. However, there are also groups related to study but still most of FB users spare their time visiting unnecessary pages. In the context of Litosseliti and Sunderland, a (2002: 4) person have made their habits just scrolling down on the phone screen using FB and moreover according to this study addresses abroad researchers (Coleman, 2013; Kinginger, 2009, 2013; Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, & McManus, 2015). To find out impacts of social networking sites on people's language and their identity. In Pakistan, Facebook users also waste their time on using facebook.

In the response of above question, 54% responded with YES, However, 33% were among NO but Majority of them did not know. In addition, many of them know well that women's are badly treated on Facebook and how women construct their identity through Facebook Of course most of participants viewed that woman more than men are on the verge of abuse and defame. Some users tag weird pages to some women in order to tease them simultaneously. Despite taking care of moral values women are soft target by these bloggers. According to (Rosenberg, 1986), identity is an important part of the self-concept. Self-concept is the totality of a person's thoughts and feelings in reference to oneself as an object and (Altheide, 2000, p. 2). Identity is that part of the self "by which we are known to others". Thus, findings highlighted the others behavior towards women is rough and embracing.



It was astonishing to see that 57% men make irritating comments against women, 33% were women while 10% was randomly observed. So, according to result men takes more interest to use irrelevant language or comments for women also they have stereotype thinking in their mind for women. According to Frank Hornell (2003), bothering comments were suggested by men in all grounds. However, women do misbehave but she cares some limits. According to Fairclough (1997: 80), it is that leftover, which is kept

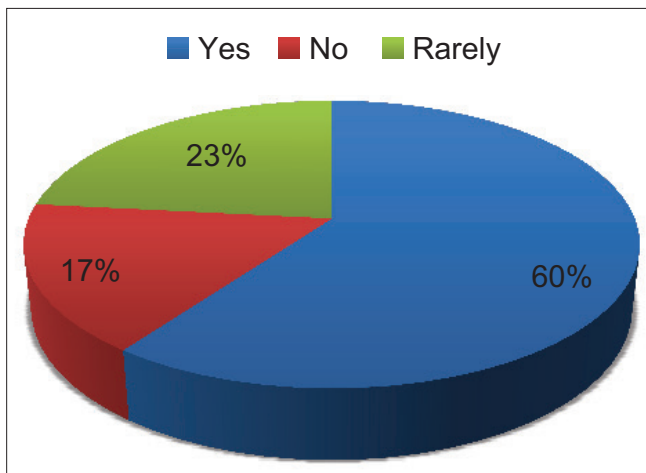


Figure 3. Do you use facebook?

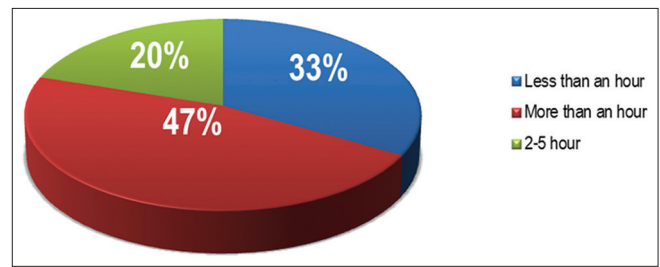


Figure 5. How much do you spend on facebook?

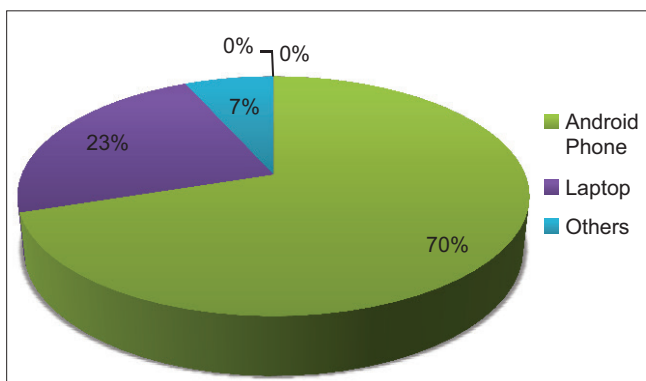


Figure 4. Form where you access facebook?

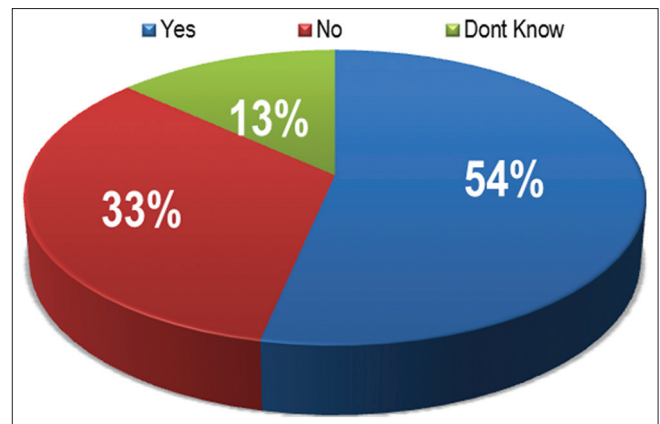
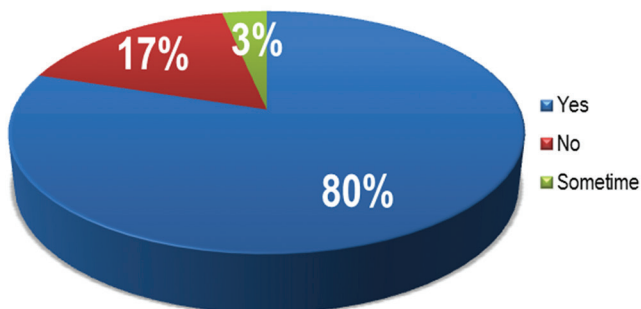


Figure 6. Do you think women are badly treated on social networking sites?

unsaid be made important to the actual contents for a text. Thus, men are more aggressive than women using Facebook pages. The outcome of findings tells that men are making more irritating comments against women.

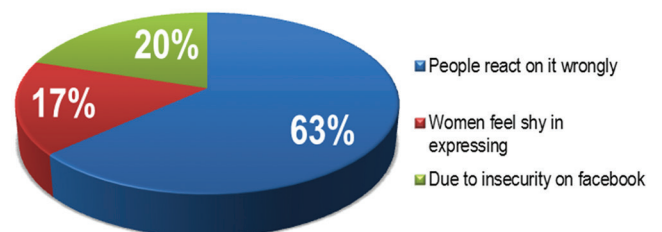
**Do you agree people become more reactive on women'**



Majority of the people become reactive on women's post while seeing their posts unconsciously they react. As a result even they are not aware how it impacts on women's personality and 17 percent are unaware but 3 percent are also sometime involved in reactions of post. Surely, men feel proud in pointing out women as they find no subject other than making

disgusting comments. According to (Woodward, 2004). I am different from you in some ways, emotionally, morally, mentally and so forth. Although, men pretend to be righteous but on the women context they show their real colors.

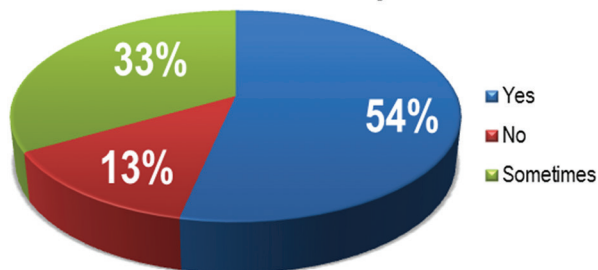
**Why women are reluctant in posting their status on facebook?**



According to result, Women's are much suppressed because of linguistically representation of women. Women's feel shy while expressing their emotions due to security reasons they always think hundred times while posting or uploading anything on Facebook. Likewise, there inner fear proves her right and people react on it with negative perception by giving unwanted funny comments in women's post and it makes their identity always suppressed. (Crystal, 2001). Because online interactions lack the facial expressions and body gestures vital to expressing opinions and attitudes, emoticons were introduced to fill a void in online

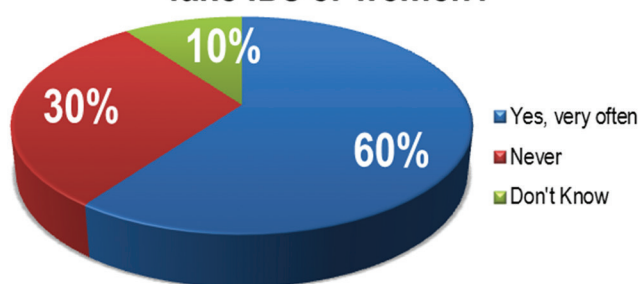
communication. Writer found that women are not actually willing to post their status because people misunderstand it. Therefore, it has assumed that our society has negative perspective towards women's posts.

### Do you agree people use sexist remarks on women's posts?



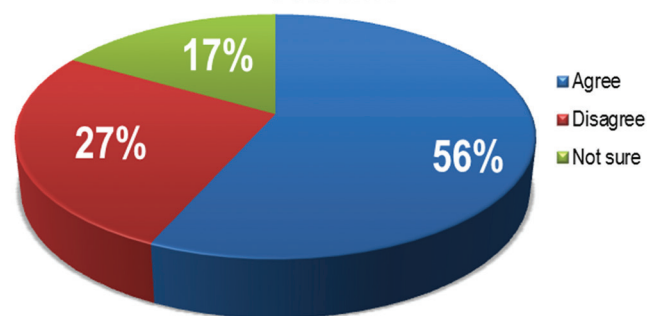
According to great deal of research, particularly in terms of percentage it is clear that people use sexist remarks on women's post 54 percent people are in favor. Although there are some students don't have any idea relate to post except those at last, 33 percent also used sexist comments in rare cases. It has become common now days that pictorial format jokes are available on many websites and people wasting no time share on their profiles. In addition to being entertaining, I'm a fun-loving person construes his positive temperament. Studies in gender attraction revealed that sense of humor is a highly remarkable characteristic to both genders (e.g. Sprecher & Regan, 2002) and can be sent as a strategy for starting relationship (Li et al. 2009); Researcher found that people react on posts for the sack of fun. From findings, it is observed that people do make awkward comments.

### Have you ever faced male profile with fake IDs of women?



Throughout most of the students faced very often fake IDs of women. Most importantly majority were facing. Consequently, 30 percent never used and 10 percent were not aware of fake IDs. It has been observed that girls and boys are aware of who are actually talking to them as they note while chatting. According to (Scott-Dixon, 2002; Koskela, 2004; Senft, 2008) Therefore, people try different ways to attract opposite sex to make relationship. It was hoped that social media would empower young women to counter mainstream media stereotypes and provide them with the discursive power to intentionally construct new and more vibrant definitions of what it means to be a "girl". Researcher wanted to tell that few people make fake IDs in order to attract opposite sex to gain their interest.

### Do you think that the facebook representation of women encourages young people to have a positive self esteem?



As a result, 56 percent were agreeing that yes the Facebook representation of women truly encourages young people to have a positive self-esteem and on their hand, 27 percent were disagree. Moreover 17 percent were not sure about this. When this type of representation will reach at FB users, certainly they would avoid making ridiculous remarks. It is an opportunity for them to realize not to devalue women but respect to have form relationship. Predictions were offered, girls have indeed come to inhabit, and in fact numerically dominate, online spaces (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, & Macgill, 2007; Media Awareness Network, 2005). According to writer, representation of women on facebook bring positive image towards youth. Last but not least, it has been found that more and more women's participation make young people enthusiastic.

### CONCLUSION

As result the study concludes in understanding that in Pakistani society, the women usually lead a miserable life which is due to bound structure of customs, which needs to have a careful watch especially in social networking websites, one of them is Facebook. Similarly, the women that belong to rural sites of Pakistan do live in strict terms and regulations. According to Chinoy's (2012) documentary, these families are tending to mold their own daughters as "good-behaved" women that teach them the ways to please their own patridal role of society in terms of fathers, brothers and their husbands. Besides this, study presents to refer heinous crime of acid attack in Pakistan. It showed that around more than 100 of these cases have been reported per year even which many of them are unnoticed.

The society of Pakistan is culturally suffocated to survive. The women set back with basic necessities at many occasions. The Pakistani people usually do employ such language as medium in social media networks that present marginalization of women gender at many posts and it makes a sense that they set not equal to men.

The possibility of this effort in form of research can create new vista of exploring knowledge that might help to enlighten as well as pay allow both genders, men as well as women of Pakistani society to explore and assist women for establishing themselves far better human beings.

### Suggestions

The following study may assist to future researchers to analyze use of language in social media applications, which are more to Facebook application only. The research in future also can prove to analyze different aspects related to feminist approach which is represented as well as promoted in different social media network applications with different ways of adjective usage referring to women gender. However, it could take large samples of participants that can reflect from different contextual settings for analyzing varied widespread attitudes.

### Research Ethics

As to ensure that the study was performed in accordance with ethical guidelines, certain measures were taken. All members voluntarily took participation in the study. An informed consent document was also handed out to participants before they began answering questionnaire. Before the study commence, the researcher also explained the purpose of the study, the basic procedures involved, and the intended future use of the data. All of the data collected from the participants was kept confidential and specific data will never be linked to specific participants. In order to ensure this confidentiality, the researcher presented data in aggregate forms only.

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