Gender and Cyber Communication: A Systematic Literature Review of Challenges Faced by Women in Pakistan

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Abstract: *Cyber communication and gender issues have been subjects of sociolinguistic discussions among researchers in recent years. Online gender harassment has become a common phenomenon in the internet era. This harassment is aggravated when sufferers face more persecution due to delay, denial, and in some cases, unavailability of justice from the country's criminal justice system. Though third-world countries have categorized laws dealing with cyber-harassment to deal with cyber-criminals, the same system paves the way for secondary persecution. Past studies show that law enforcement agencies trivializing problems further victimizes the victim. This study is an endeavour to answer the following questions. What kind of cyber threats do Pakistani women face? Why has a country's judicial system failed to control cyber-harassment cases? What steps are required to deal with cyber-harassment? For this purpose, the data is collected from ten online journals and blogs. The study reveals that gender discrepancies, cybercrimes, and increasing reports of violent misogyny on the internet highlight the weakness of the country's security mechanism requires instant measures to be taken by the government by making strict cyber laws and a quick cyber force.*

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Introduction

Promoting gender equality as a globalized phenomenon of the twentieth century has been a topic of unprecedented significance. Mainstreaming of women in every social dimension has given rise to multiple 'emerging challenges' of difference, harassment, and cyber threats, along with technological improvements in the field of cyber-communication and the digital world. As technology has transformed education,

business, politics, and entertainment, it also alters the prospects and challenges women in Pakistan face. Sadly, gender disparity also prevails in the selection, access, and utilization of ICTs. For instance, according to Bridging the Gender Gap (2018), 38 % of women are more uncertain than men to possess a cell phone. When they possess a cell phone, they make and get fewer calls, send fewer text messages, and utilize the internet cautiously than males. While standard internet-based life has altered how individuals speak with one another in various settings, for example, emergencies, legislative issues, and civil disobedience, these stages prohibit females who experience education, financial, and availability hindrances. Besides, socio-cultural standards driven by a male-centric society obstruct females' appropriation and utilization of these stages. For instance, about 14% of Facebook users in India are female. (Bridging the Gender Gap, 2018). A couple of researchers have laid out online badgering and adapting techniques of women via web-based networking media sites. Abokhodair and Vieweg inspected the security practices of Middle East women and featured how women influence pervasive community standards to keep themselves from provocation. For instance, it is recorded that some female users consciously post photographs of infants as their profile pictures or utilize their youngsters' names to cover their online personalities (Norah Abokhodair 2017).

It has been studied that female WhatsApp and Twitter clients use different ways to deal with stress; they record their youngsters' voices or utilize *nom de plumes* (a name used by a writer instead of the writer's actual name) to secure their cyber identity. In addition, they see obstructions to telephone possession and utilization, such as the price of gadgets and the internet, safety, and provocation concerns, which also constrain advanced education more intensely than

males.

Identifying these structural restrictions, Human-Computer Collaboration for Development, the government of Pakistan has decided to use Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology to create voice forums to reduce distances and overcome various kinds of barriers, like connectivity barriers, literacy barriers, and socioeconomic barriers (Raza et al., 2019). Phone calls can be used to reduce connectivity issues, literacy barriers can be reduced by speaking and listening in the local language, and socioeconomic barriers can be resolved by using helplines and toll-free (1-800) numbers. Users of these services can contact a toll-free number, record audio posts, file complaints about harassment, and discuss associated problems with cyber-harassment and extortion, among other things.

Literature Review

Recently language has penetrated its roots in Gender differences by using languages and their context. Many sociolinguists have explored this phenomenon; Lakoff (1975), Tannen (1990), Trudgill (1974), and Zimmerman and West (1975). On the other hand, emerging Information and Communication Technology (ICT) made us more dependent on Internet socializing, giving birth to several well-known social media sites. This emergence is a threat for a cyber attacker to dive into the privacy of a person's personal information.

Along with the rise of these social media sites, this less edited material generated contractions, abbreviations, and structural reductions, which reveal its own typographic, orthographic, morphological, and syntactic rules, named cyber language. Ferrera, Brunner, and Whittemore (1991) have named cyber language "interactive written discourse" because the cyber language has to deal with written material. Cyber communication and gender issues have been

subjects of sociolinguistics debates among researchers in recent years.

Although ICT has successfully revolutionized fields like education, healthcare, businesses, mass media, and politics, digital gender disparities are evident along with the increase in cyberspace, especially in developing countries. Resultantly, the terms gender boundaries, gender discrimination, gender discrepancies, cybercrimes, cyber harassment, and unsocial media are generated, giving rise to subjects like cyberpsychology to examine online behaviours and the complexities online users face. According to THE DIPLOMAT's report, Mahboob Mohsin (2016) claims the most reported offence against Pakistani women is *'cyber stalking'*, which is 80 % of all the complaints. The report further claims, "Most of the victims are young women facing blackmail, a routine part of Pakistani women's daily lives."

This gender discrimination can be observed in every field, from educational institutions to the workplace. The issue is evident in developed and developing countries, but females' access to the internet is higher in developed countries due to better cyber laws. According to Kwetishe Joro et al. (2014), gender differences are more evident in the developing world, where there is a 16% difference, as opposed to a 2% difference within the developed world. Compared to the developed nations, where there is only a 2% difference, women use the internet 16% less frequently than males. The difference here is that the developed countries have been prosperous in devising gadgets and making infrastructure to cope with these crimes, and developing countries are still trying to cope with the issues. Another major problem with the internet is that despite having critical appreciation towards the content, people started sweeping content without any authentic analysis of the situation; hence there is no control over the freedom of speech over the internet.

Before the technological revolution, private and public officials kept their records and private data in the form of physical documents (Waldo, Lin, & Millett, 2010). Studies show that physically stored information was not easily accessible to anyone to take advantage of it, but their safety was not assured. Meanwhile, new paradigms have created big data banks with different views of data, not physical record preservation. Though data banks are a more secure way of storing information than physical record-keeping, everything from information available, even online, with firm security initiatives is highly likely to be attacked. According to Anderson and Rainey (2018), the reason for this danger has increased with the progress in technology and the increasing share of web users. **Cybercrimes have** a variety of ranges and kinds; thus, sufferers of cybercrimes are revealed without age restrictions and social backgrounds.

Additionally, these offences require experience; rather than technical achievements, the world has become a global village, and diverse ways of easy access to people worldwide and hacking their information were also created. With the latest advancement in technology, every user has easy internet access, but regrettably, this ease was also used detrimentally; like many other things, the use of technology leads to more cyber abuse. Nurse (2018) claims that internet users have ten times a higher threat of becoming a cybercrime target than physical crime.

According to a study conducted by Anjum, U. (2020), the term "cybercrime" first came into public use after the use of Will Gibson's science fiction novel "Neuromancer" in 1985. This term has gained popularity and made a place in the common lexicon due to its persistent use in a wide range of contexts (Jamil, 2006). Hence, Navneet K has claimed that while any unlawful or punitive action by government or

industry agencies is known as an offence, of all the many forms that criminality can take, the most common is a cybercrime that is committed on the internet (Navneet, 2018)). Cybercrimes extend exponentially due to rapid technological advancements that do not yet account for current measures to protect internet users. Present tools and technologies used by law enforcement agencies are frequently outdated to new forms of cybercrime, making investigations difficult.

According to Burnaby et al. (2019) study on the effects of cybersexual harassment, the sexualization of female characters in video games can be necessary to incite virtual sexual harassment toward women. For this study, the General Aggression model is used with the integration of the Confluence Model of Sexual Aggression

(Anderson & Anderson, 2008). The study highlights that eight out of ten women are sexually beleaguered or assaulted in the workplace in their lifetime, and every fourth out of ten females have experienced virtual sexual harassment. Studies show that the behaviour of online gender harassment becomes the reason for offline (face-to-face) sexual assault or harassment, which is one of the limitations of this study, as Burnay et al. (2019) describe; "This study focused on online sexual harassment, but it could be equally important to examine the extent to which observations of the present study also generalize to offline sexual harassment (p. 221)." In addition to virtual gender harassment, the causes of offline gender harassment should also be discussed.

Ubair (2020) focuses on the need for enhancing knowledge about digital victimization, sexual harassment, cyberbullying, cyber abuse, increased rate of victimization of single women and female social media users. Results show that insufficient knowledge of cyber protection measures, easy access to social media, porn sites, and sexualized video games with

sexualized or non-sexualized female characters have the opportunity to harass their female counterparts sexually. This leads to the need for strict cybersecurity policies, sound detection mechanisms, and punishment policies by agencies for cybercrime. Ubair (2020) shares data from a survey that by 2011 third of the world population (about 2.3 billion) had access to the Internet which has increased to four billion by 2018; the sensitive thing about Internet users is that about 60 % of Internet mentioned above users belong to developing countries where there is no proper mechanism of cybersecurity due to which female internet users of these countries are easy victims of cyber threats.

Methodology

The method that is adopted for this study is the *systematic literature review*. A *systematic literature review* (SLR) is defined by Okoli, C., & Schabram, K. (2010) as "*a systematic, explicit, comprehensive, and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners*" (p. 1).

The SLR is not just like traditional literature reviews; the function of SLR is to critically appraise, identify, and review the existing evidence from searches of several specified databases using precise search terms about a noticeably defined problem. The SLR can even deal with fewer than ten papers or journals. The data selected for this paper is taken from available online journals, blogs, reports, and magazines published from 2010 to 2019, providing reports against female cyber-harassment cases. The magazines, journals, and reports shortlisted for the study are; Naveed (2014) *Analysis of Cyber Language: Identifying Gender Boundaries*, Ilyas, F.(2019, April 13). *Cybercrimes against women on the rise*, Newspaper Dawn, Editorial (2019, October 10). *Women as cybercrime victims*, the Express Tribune,

Abbasi, S. *The unsocial media: Is online abuse silencing women in Pakistan,* www.geo.tv, Qarar Shakeel (2018, Oct.23). *Cybercrime reports hit a record high in 2018: FIA,* Dawn.com, Mohsin Mehboob (2016, April 16). *The Cyber Harassment of Women in Pakistan.* The Diplomat, (2018, August 02). *Punjab Commission for Status of Women Arranges Consultation On Cyber Crimes & Laws in Pakistan* (PCSW), and Kwetishe Joro et al. (2014) *Gender Issues and Information Communication Technology for Development (ICT 4D): Prospects and Challenges for Women.*

The data is secondary because it deals with available online material. The SLR can either have a quantitative or qualitative literature review. The researcher is free to analyze the data as per the kind of data collection. If the data is from observations, interviews, and verbal interactions, the study will be qualitative; the present study does not have this kind of data, so it deals with a quantitative literature review. The research conducted through SLR is more reliable, systematic, and authentic because it has a well-devised, systematic, and measurable process, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Selected Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion		Exclusion
Research Questions	Mentioned	
Conceptualization	Gender harassment through cyberspace	
Measures/ Key variables	Gender issues, cyber-communication, cyber threats, women in Pakistan,	Issues related to males, non-cyber communication
Research design	Qualitative studies	Experimental, observational, quantitative
Participants	Young, educated, female Pakistani social media users	Males, teens, technologically illiterate, non-Pakistani social media users
Time frame	Online available relevant data from 2010 to 2019	Data published before 2010
Data	Secondary	Primary

Significance of the Study

There is a shortage of studies on the convergence of gender and social media use, specifically in underdeveloped countries and generally in developing regions. Although a number of the previous works have raised uncertainties concerning the low interest of females in these administrations and the provocation they experienced, some have given isolated bits of data (e.g., however posts by women got extra votes because of being teased by men), no earlier work has inspected the essentials that outcome in the guarded utilization of those stages by women, represented women' investment by breaking down use logs, and arranged out plan proposals for making comprehensive and welcoming internet based life voice discussions for women. This work shows the first top-to-the-bottom record of how online life voice discussions were utilized by women in Pakistan.

Discussion

Cybercrime has many forms and shapes, like pornography, impersonation, tampering, forgery, electronic fraud, blackmailing, cyberstalking, trolling, bullying, intimidation, revenge porn, and invasion of privacy. This modern phenomenon in Pakistan is becoming intelligent and organized with the increase in cyberspace. According to a report published in *The Express Tribune on April 10, (2018),* women make up a staggering 90 per cent of the cases reported to the cybercrime cell, and this 90 per cent originates in Facebook. This is technology-related violence against women (VAW), which is increasing significantly. This highlights that women of today are not only the principal victim of cybercrimes in Pakistan but also more vulnerable to cybercriminals.

A report by Shakeel Qarar (2018) in *DAWN.COM* tells the sensitivity of the issue that how cybercrime reports hit a record high in 2018. According to data shared by the FIA Cyber Crime Wing after the promulgation of the *Prevention of Cyber Crimes Act* (PECA) 2016:

Table 1

Year	Inquiries Conducted	Registered Cases	Arrests
2016	514	49	47
2017	1290	207	160
2018	2295	255	209

The pitfalls and flaws in law result in weak cases supporting and encouraging cyber-criminals to commit more crimes. The number of registered cybercrimes has reached the critical limit of 1200 cases per month, which requires a well-trained cyber staff to investigate and resolve the crimes quickly. The shortage of staff, the lengthy resolution process, and the weak justice system are impending dangers for half of the population of Pakistan. In the case of women, they are likely to sabotage themselves, and the stereotypical norms of society hinder them from taking action against these cyber-attacks.

The country's borrowed criminal justice legal framework is inappropriate and unable to deal with the sophisticated online hazards of the 21st-century cyber age. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, passed by The National Assembly of Pakistan, is the revised bill, which has added a detailed review of the various cyber-crimes committed by online users keeping in view the vulnerability of women. Considering the kinds and categories of digital crimes, it has a list of 51 clauses, each of which has sub-clauses according to the nature of the cybercrimes.

According to Internet Penetration Pakistan by Gender (2016), 11.7% of women and 19.7% of men in Pakistan used the Internet in 2016. According to Pakistan Today Profit's 2019 report, up to January 2019, the country's population of active social media users increased by 5.7%. By January 2019, there were 37 million active social media users worldwide, representing 18% of Pakistan's entire population.

A real reason behind these attacks is cyber literacy among people. Attackers attack someone's data through links containing some lottery content, etc. Recently, some incidents that were unethical and explicit content captured over security cameras became viral on the internet. Despite all possible efforts, removing every trace of such content is impossible. Similarly, some pornographic websites are using private images of women collected over social media for their websites. Cyber wing FIA data statistics showed that females reported in ProPK (2019) reported 90% of the cyber cases. The studies show several reasons women used the internet for communication, social interaction, and entertainment and were more contented with some of the didactic resources than men. Another report shows that the actual number of cases might be higher than the actual reported because

some people do not report these crimes or are unaware of the FIA Cyber Wing in Pakistan. The real gender norms have disappeared from internet communications. The race to keep an intended identity has taken the storm for which fancy language is doing sufficient work. These communications are encountering real issues with gender roles in internet communications.

According to a report by Geo. tv, a senior official of FIA Cyber Crime Wing said:

Table 2

The number of complaints of women regarding online women harassment	From years	Registered cases
850	2016 to 2018	587

Table 3

A Report Shared by Abbasi, S. The Unsocial Media

Year	Calls received on the helpline	Complaints via email	Complaints related to men	Complaints related to women
2016 to 2018	2781	134	41 %	59%

The reports show that there are more harassment cases of women than males, and females consider more vulnerable to these cyber attackers. The other reported instances are the instances of online bullying of media personnel; Twitter has witnessed the bullying of some famous Pakistani journalist females. These journalists were attacked and given life-taking threats. In this case, these females reported fear and lack of productivity in their working space. The first violence study of Pakistan (2017) also accounts for the summary of internet issues. These females have to face gender-biased comments, and patriarchal issues are also studied in cyber-space. The report by pro-Pakistani (2019) titled 'Global Gender Gap Report 2020' claims that Pakistan is ranked thi[rd] lowest in gender equality means Pakistan is at the 151st position out of 153 countries.

With emerging entrepreneurship, females have been seen as more active on social media sites for their products. While doing their business, women have confronted some serious issues about their working spaces. They have been criticized and are usually not supported by stereotypical males in cyberspace. These abusive language comments have increased the stress, anger, fear, and threats reported by the female complements.

In terms of eliminating the impartial behaviour of females over cyberbullying, the government and FIA are also making policies to make the internet a neutral zone for working, browsing, and surfing over the internet. It is evident from the discussion that women are more vulnerable to these attacks due to their trusting nature, social training, and lack of communication with a family, giving an open chance to cyber bullies to harass these females.

Conclusion

Females who experienced online bullying had to suffer from mental and emotional stress, due to which there was a massive upset in their personal lives as well as in their social circling. In a report by Abbasi, S. (2017), *The unsocial media* Geo. tv claims that 29% of female cyber-harassment victims felt their physical safety was at risk. Studies show that

online threats are converted to offline threats, and several cases are reported in which victims have to deprive themselves of their lives. The technological revolution was studied in Pakistan after 2005, but Cyber Crime Act was promulgated in 2016 after a visible rise in cyber crimes. All the available reported data on cybercrimes has no records before 2016, which shows the lack of priority and the seriousness of the parliamentarians. Though the government has taken some steps towards cyber-harassment predominantly female harassment issues, as National Response Centre for Cyber Crime (NR3C) under FIA has launched the cyber rescue helpline 9911, which has received 62% of calls regarding Cyberbullying, such steps are not enough to control the cyber harassment against women. This harassment is aggravated when sufferers face further harassment due to delay, denial, and in some cases, unavailability of justice at the hands of the country's criminal justice system. These limitations could be managed by involving participatory design processes and incorporating low-income, less-educated women in the design process. From a stance of ecology, from the feminist viewpoint and cyber communication, there is a necessity to replicate; however, the design of various voice forums and female harassment toll-free help lines may transfer social injustice and patriarchate-driven persecution from offline social spaces to virtual social spaces. Proper cyber-security awareness plans should be initiated by the government-backed up by appropriate media campaigns.

Findings

The aforementioned significant findings are crucial in the context of this study.

- The majority of cybercrime victims are Pakistani women who are regular internet users.
- Sexual harassment is a common cybercrime that divorced women experience more of.

- Lack of cyber awareness and a decline in the use of internet security tools are the main contributors to being a victim of cybercrime.
- Lack of internet education is one of the causes of online gender harassment.
- Other factors contributing to cybercrime vulnerability are the absence of transparent laws and regulations to combat cybercriminals.
- Female users of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts take fewer security precautions since they are less aware of the dangers.
- The likelihood of cybercrimes such as online victimization and harassment rises as users spend more time on social networking sites.
- Due to a lack of understanding of its importance, domestic women and students do not even use the most recent antivirus and security software.
- Most female cybercrime victims do not report their offences to the appropriate authorities because they are scared due to social and cultural pressures. Moreover, they lack faith in these entities' effectiveness and operating methods, and in most cases, they are afraid of their identity exposure.
- Women who work in cyberspace face various forms of exploitation than males do. For instance, they have to deal with unapproved photo distribution, obscene anonymous phone calls, fake profiles, defaming and discouragement calls, ridiculing by hacking, provocation, transformation, and social engineering attacks to steal login records and sensitive credit card data technically known as phishing emails, cyber stalking, and other forms of online harassment.
- Solitary women spend more time online and have more friends on social

media platforms than married women do. These elements are linked to a higher risk of falling victim to cybercrime.

- The majority of the time, people use their phones to access the internet, which increases the risk of information being compromised since it is not a secure way to access sensitive data like bank accounts.

Recommendations

The recommended policy and significant findings already provided in this study serve as the foundation for the study's recommendations.

- Information on cybercrime must be covered during school and college education.
- To raise awareness of cybercrimes, some lectures and seminars must be scheduled.
- For creating a secure atmosphere for reporting and evaluating cybercrimes, it should be essential for each police station to have a cybercrime unit staffed disproportionately with female officers.
- Authorities should provide all police officers with the basic knowledge they need to respond sensitively to complaints regarding cybercrime. This can be done by sending public service announcements electronically and through other media-transmission channels so that all citizens know the types and effects of cybercrime. To maintain and update reactions to cybercrime, the cybercrime department should arrange awareness seminars and field training. Further and ongoing research is crucial to stay connected with the current technological changes and challenges of forthcoming cyberspace and the effectiveness of awareness and the complaint procedure.

This is a trivial effort in gender issues and cyber-communication: prospects and challenges for Pakistani women precisely and for the female of underdeveloped countries generally, whereas further research is required in this field.

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