



Men's Perception of Women Regarding the Internet Usage in the Khyber Agency Pakistan: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract: *Khyber agency is bordered with Afghanistan. Due to continuous war in Afghanistan, patriarchal society and domination of males, the women of Khyber agency have no access to education, basic human rights and internet technologies. This paper investigated the gender discrimination in the use of the internet in the Khyber agency of Pakistan, the war-torn area adjacent to Afghanistan. A mixed method approach vis-a-vis in-depth interviews and purposive survey of the respondents was used to collect data. The in-depth interviews were analyzed using NVivo and SPSS was employed to analyze survey data. The findings indicate that there is a digital divide that promotes gender discrimination in the Khyber agency regarding the internet usage. The patriarchal nature of the tribal society deprives women from internet contributing to the gender discrimination. Additionally, the male dominance of the rural tribal society is associated with stereotypical discourses of women.*

Key Words: Internet Usage, Gender Discrimination, Khyber Agency, Rural Areas, Pakistan.

Introduction

Approximately, 4.9 million women face discrimination in Pakistan (NIPS & ICF, 2013). The areas of discrimination include child marriages, lack of education, healthcare, unemployment, domestic violence and discrimination in hiring for jobs (Abbas, Hameed, & Waheed, 2011). In addition to this, both married and unmarried women face discrimination in property, occupation, and education while unmarried women's are facing discrimination in mobility and way of behaving (Pokharel, 2008). Likewise, the annual UN report based on four sustainable development goals such as child labor, education, healthcare, and employment reveals alarming result of gender inequalities in Pakistan. It was revealed that Pakistan is in the top four countries where 12 percent of the women (4.9 million) are deprived of their rights in Pakistan (UNICEF, 2013). 98.8 percent of the Pashtun women living in rural areas lack access to education. In terms

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of mass media use, access is variable to only 2 percent of rural women, that is to say, they can use mass media once a week (NIPS & ICF, 2013). In contrary to these figures, 47 percent of rural men have access to education (Siegmann, 2009).

[Enochsson \(2005\)](#) reported that it is an acknowledged fact that boys have more internet access as compared to girls. The reasons which hinder women's use of modern technologies are norms, values, and customs of traditional family systems considered appropriate to protect the family honor limiting women and girls' access to technologies (Siegmann, 2009). However, research on the gender discrimination regarding internet access in the war-torn Khyber agency Pakistan, an area adjacent to Afghanistan is non-existent. The male-dominated nature, strict religious observance, obligatory wearing parda (veil) to cover face; prohibited to talk with na-mehram (in accordance with Islamic teachings, the man you are religiously allowed to marry) are some of the reasons behind gender discrimination in the Khyber agency. Therefore, this paper investigates the factors which contribute to the discrimination of internet usage among men and women in Khyber agency. This study will enhance our understanding of discrimination patterns imposed on gender in this traditional society regarding the difference between the usage of internet consumption among males and females in Khyber agency Pakistan. The findings can reveal discourses behind gender discrimination and aid our understanding that how the continuous war affected the lives of inhabitants in this conflict-laden area.

Literature Review

Background

There has been war in Afghanistan for almost 39 years. First by Soviet Union (1979 to 1989) and then by USA after 9/11 from 2001 to till now. ([Girardet, 2012](#)). Due to 1500 miles long shared border of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and 300 passes links which link Afghanistan with Quetta and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan, the refugees and Al Qaeda have no other option to seek asylum in Pakistan ([Hilali, 2017](#)). Due to war around 3 million refugees along with hidden terrorists moved to Pakistan and settled in the nearby areas like Khyber agency ([Mohammad, 2016](#)). To eliminate terrorism operation started in these areas in the form of Zarb e Azab by Pakistan army and drone attacks from America ([Javaid, 2015](#)); these destroyed schools, homes, and many people were displaced ([Ahmad, 2010](#)). Therefore, the people of Khyber agency lack education, new trends, women empowerments and technologies. They are living in tribal system where male is dominating and has the power to take all the decisions regarding women.

Internet Gender Discrimination in Khyber Agency Pakistan

Gender discrimination is a common feature of male-dominated societies. Pakistan is a patriarchal society where males tend to dominate females in all decision makings. Gender discrimination means social differences between boys and girls, men and women ([Kim et al., 2010](#)). Likewise, gender is defined on the basis of norms, behaviors, activities, relationships, and responsibilities which are assigned by the society to the male and females; equality means that both girl and boy

as a human being have equal rights, opportunities and needs irrespective of gender ([Sein & Harindranath, 2004](#)). Men and women do not significantly differ in term of intelligence and IQ scores ([Hanton, 2015](#)). The occupational segregation of men and women is deeply embedded in all the regions across the globe. Females dominate domestic work, education and social works (UN, 2015). Currently, the IT industry is dominated by men ([Zaki, Van Boheemen, Bestebroer, Osterhaus, & Fouchier, 2012](#)). In this regard, [Silvermann and Pritchard \(1996\)](#) explored the differences between boys and girls and how they learn about technology. They noted that girls prefer building and decorating houses, while boys prefer to build bridges. In this vein, [Halpern \(1997\)](#) elaborated that females and males differ in terms of individual abilities and interests. Parveen (2007) investigated the social status of women while studying a sample of 156 women in the rural areas and concluded that stereotypes assigned with this status are related with awareness among women which is a determinant factor for gender discrimination against women. Her findings suggested that there is a dire need to improve women's gender awareness in terms of their literacy levels, access to information and productive resources, and participation in social activities by establishing women's organization in the locality. The internet is a source of sharing ideas with other people.

Why Women are not Allowed to Use Internet

[Berson and Berson \(2005\)](#) found that young people can adapt, create and share ideas through the internet. Writing in the context of the rural traditional society of Pakistan, [Siegmann \(2009\)](#) elaborated the perception among parents in the tribal areas that the girls who use mobile phone fix time with the boys and run away with the same boy from the home. She noted that such kinds of girls are ultimately killed in the name of honor. One of the plausible reason for this dislike towards women, particularly girls in Pakistan is the absence of role models in this field. As [Zuga \(1999\)](#) researched the theories behind the "male domain", that view is still present today. In addition, there is still a lack of role models and educators are struggling to retain young women in technology-related courses. Likewise, Huhman (2012) explained that there is a lack of women role models in technology field because this field is considered to be male-dominated.

In another study, [Hu, Zhang, Dai, and Zhang \(2012\)](#) acknowledge factors associated with internet usage such as efficiency, information overloaded and usage experience. They concluded that there are differences among genders, with male generally having a higher perception of usefulness than female counterparts. However, in Pakistan, there exists an association between the internet and mobile phones use and degradation of traditional values. [Zainudeen, Iqbal, Samarajiva, and Ratnadiwakara \(2008\)](#) found that there is a significant divide between men and women regarding the ownership of the mobile phone. In the view of authors, this disparity of mobile ownership is attributed to fear among mothers that their daughters use mobile phones for dating with boys, thus, bringing disgrace for their families. Furthermore, the advancement of new technologies the harassment among peers has become common in the contemporary times ([Njoroge, 2013](#)).

[Stanciu and Tinca \(2014\)](#) argued that the internet is used as a part of everyday life and work. But in certain cases, the internet is taking control of people lives, making them wasting time and introducing into the private lives of the people. Whereas with regards to the use of the internet, [Baker and Scantlebury \(1995\)](#) found that girls were more interested in the activities of social and verbal nature, while boys were more interested in the manipulation of objects and building things. These differences in interest are often stereotypical and reflected in the world around us. From a young age, boys and girls are given different toys to play with as the toys for boys are items such as action figures or sports equipment, items geared toward being active and moving. Meanwhile, girls are given dolls, something that encourages social interaction. The differences are reflected in the use of technology between men and women.

Role of Government

Another source of discrimination between genders is the availability of facilitates. In this view, [Zolnierek, Eisner, and Burton \(2001\)](#) found that facilities are based on the local market. Availability of providers is more in urban areas than rural. Hence urban areas are more likely than rural areas to take benefits from the internet. Similarly, [Fox and Porca \(2001\)](#) indicate that such facilities in the rural area will be provided only when there is demand from people, also imply that this expansion should be funded by user's fees when possible. On another hand, there is sufficient support from the government in the form of subsidies.

The individualized use of new media is assumed to be full of worries and degradation of traditional community norms and values ([Livingstone & Bober, 2004](#)). For obtaining quality information, [Robinson and Schlegl \(2005\)](#) emphasized the training of youth so that they acquire useful skills to perform a search for quality information. In addition, [Tan and Yang \(2014\)](#) the use different applications, online entertainment, and social networking changed the individual behavior and the ways individuals interact with each other.

Theoretical Framework

This study employed the Feminist theory proposed by Mary Wollstonecraft as a theoretical framework. It aims to understand the nature of discrimination on the basis of sex and gender in economic inequality, power, and oppression ([Falco, 2010](#)). This theory studies the role of men's and women and highlights the gender inequality in literature, media studies, and sociology ([Mahalik, Van Ormer, & Simi, 2000](#)). The feminist theory emerged in 1794 in publications like "The changing women" which addressed women's issues ([Mahalik, Van Ormer, & Simi, 2000](#)). This theory addresses the limited rights of women due to men's domination in the society.

The feminist theory has many different strands and positions to look at the women's problems. For instance, liberal feminists argue that women have the same capacity as men, then why men and women experience the social world differently and consequently, men's dominate the social world in terms of presentation, opportunities, and power. This theory discusses not only gender discrimination and inequality but also women's being oppressed and even abused by

the men. Structural oppression highlighted that women's oppression and discrimination are due to capitalism and racism. They agree with Karl Marx and Frederick Engels that the working class is exploited by the capitalism, but they extend this exploitation to the gender, that there is exploitation on the basis of gender also. Men have the control over resources and discriminate women by their dominance in society.

Research Questions

1. Is there gender discrimination in internet usage in Khyber agency Pakistan?
2. What are the reasons behind gender discrimination in the internet usage in Khyber agency Pakistan?
3. Why women do not have access to internet technologies in these areas?

Methods

This study utilized quantitative methodology via-a-via survey methods and qualitative methodology vis-a-via in-depth interviews to explore the discrimination discourse regarding women's use of interviews in the Khyber Agency in Pakistan. In other words, this study is an attempt to highlight gender discrimination in internet usage in Khyber agency Pakistan. It focuses on the internet usage of females in Khyber agency. For this research, the population is the youth (ranging from 15 to 29 years) living in Khyber agency, tribal belt neighboring the Northwest province Khyber-namely Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The snowball sampling technique was used to collect data from the respondents. The researchers used snowball sampling keeping in view the local cultural and traditional sensitivities. As there is no specific college, university or any other institution for females from where the researchers could have constituted a sampling frame and used probability sampling methods to collect data. Thus, we surveyed 100 respondents and analyzed the data through SPSS.

To understand the factors responsible for gender discrimination regarding the non-availability and discriminative attitude towards women regarding the use of the internet, conducted in-depth interviews with five respondents in Khyber agency. Due to strict Parda (veil) system for women in Khyber agency, the researchers again relied on snowball sampling where we contacted one respondent who agreed to talk with us. Then, we requested the respondent to recommend some other respondents who were willing to share their view regarding the access and permission to use internet. We could interview only five respondents owing to the unwillingness of the women to talk and share their views because of their traditional values and customs. Finally, these in-depth interviews were analyzed using NVIVO.

Results

This section of the paper presents the results of the study. The results are presented in the form of tables.

Table 1 indicated that the majority of the respondent are accessing the internet through Mobile phones, followed by Wi-Fi. In terms of internet usage, the table illustrates that most of the students, that is, 73 percent spend one to four hours per day on the internet.

Table 1. Usage and availability of internet.

	Frequency	Percentage
1: Gender		
Male	100	100.0
2: Through which channel you are using internet?		
Data connection (Mobile sim card)	79	79.0
WIFI	18	18.0
College University Lab	3	3.0
3: How many hours per day you use internet?		
1-2 Hours	38	38.0
3-4 Hours	35	35.0
More than 4 Hours	27	27.0

Table 2 shows that 75 percent of students find internet use in their academics; whereas, 60 percent of them think that the internet is beneficial in preparing class assignments. The table illustrates that 75 percent of respondents found the internet valuable source of getting information about current happenings in their surroundings in particular and in the country in general.

Table 2. Usage of internet for academics.

	Frequency	Percentage
Does the Internet help you in your academics?		
Strongly Agree	37	37.0
Agree	38	38.0
Neutral	11	11.0
Disagree	14	14.0
Does the Internet help you in making your class assignment?		
Strongly Agree	10	10.0
Agree	50	50.0
Neutral	20	20.0
Disagree	16	16.0
Strongly Disagree	4	4.0
Do you think internet aware you of current affairs?		
Strongly Agree	11	11.0

Agree	64	64.0
Neutral	17	17.0
Disagree	8	8.0

Table 3 shows the majority of the students feel that the internet is not helpful in findings job vacancies. The table depicts that most of the students are of the view that the internet helps them in forging social relations. The table also indicates that the use of the internet is associated with entertainment.

Table 3. General usage of internet.

	Frequency	Percentage
The Internet is helpful in finding jobs vacancies?		
Strongly Agree	8	8.0
Agree	32	32.0
Neutral	28	28.0
Disagree	32	32.0
Do you use the internet for social networking?		
Strongly Agree	28	28.0
Agree	63	63.0
Neutral	5	5.0
Disagree	4	4.0
Do you use the internet for entertainment?		
Strongly Agree	31	31.0
Agree	55	55.0
Neutral	13	13.0
Disagree	1	1.0

Results of the In-depth Interview

Researchers conducted an interview with the above individuals. Only five female individuals were interviewed because researchers did not find any institution for girls in Khyber agency from where they can find individuals for interview. Secondly, in Khyber agency, girls are bound to home boundaries and due to proper Parda system (the use of veil to cover face among women), and they did not allow the female to talk to any Na Mehram (the person with whom a girl can marry in accordance with Islamic teachings). During interview, different questions were asked to collect maximum information regarding gender discrimination in Khyber agency. All the answer were sorted and findings were managed through NVIVO software.

The in-depth interviews revealed that the most important factor contributing to gender discrimination in term of the internet usage is the parents' disapproval of the internet for girls. The parents are of the view that the use of the internet is associated with the undermining of the

traditional family values. Furthermore, the parents feel that the women who use the internet to talk with strangers and become of the source of shame for the family. The female respondents revealed that the use of internet is disliked by their parents and other family members due to traditions, the local tribal customs, norms, and values.

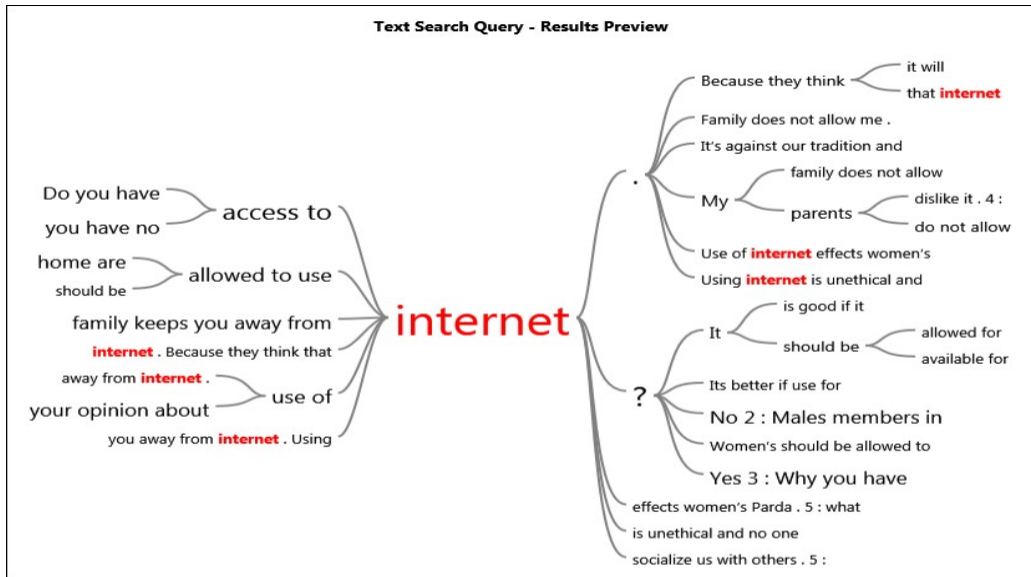


Figure 1: Findings of an in-Depth Interview.

Discussion

As expected, the findings of this study provide support to the research questions of this study that women suffer gender discrimination in Khyber agency of Pakistan. They suffer both in terms of access to the internet and the usage of the internet compared to men of their tribal and traditional area. The significant finding is that most people access the internet in Khyber agency through mobile data. Thus the majority of people are still far away from advanced internet technologies e.g. LTE, 4G, WIFI, and PTCL. It illustrates that other advance internet service providers are not available in Khyber agency; the war-torn rural and tribal areas are treated as periphery in the country. This tribal society is mostly dominated by the men who are responsible for taking family decisions ranging from the education, employment, marriage, and inheritance rights of the women. The strict adherence to religious teachings, nature of rural and traditional society embedded in tribal traditions of ancient times, illiteracy, and women dependence on men for their economic needs make things even worse for the women. The male members of the family do not allow girls to use the Internet.

The assumption is that the images and videos posted, and shared on the internet are a potential threat to traditional Parla system (veil wearing among women to cover their body) from men other than their family. This perception is embedded in the subconscious of the men that the usage of the internet allows girls to establish relationship with the boys through internet.

This is considered a revolt against traditional values and customs of a tribal society. The internet access to and usage of the internet is associated with the adoption of modern and secular values and move women particularly young girls away from religion. It is an acknowledged fact that the content which we consume does influence our attitudes and lifestyles. Put it more bluntly, the use of internet among women bear effects on their attitudes, likes, dislikes, and their approach towards life. The males consider themselves the custodians of the traditional tribal culture and decide what is appropriate and inappropriate for females. They blame that exposure to the internet is associated with the exposure to vulgar content which undermines traditional tribal culture, strays women away from the religious teachings, and indulges them in activities which become the source of shame for a family. Thus, society dislikes such girls who use the internet.

These findings are consistent with the previous literature ([Siegmann \(2009\)](#); [Zainudeen, Iqbal, Samarajiva, and Ratnadiwakara \(2008\)](#)). At the societal level, such girls are being hated by the community at large. No one shows a willingness to marry a girl who is socially active on the internet and establishes social contacts as the internet usage is considered against their values and culture. This is a determinant factor for gender discrimination against women. There is a dire need to improve women's gender awareness in terms of their literacy levels, access to information and productive resources, and participation in social activities by establishing women's organization in the locality ([Parveen, 2007](#)). The establishment of women organization at the local levels can enhance women's participation, thus, changing stereotypical attitudes towards the use of the internet in general and women in particular.

Recommendations

The findings of this study revealed that the Khyber agency is lacking basic infrastructure for internet technologies. The federal government's focus is on urban areas and rural areas such as Khyber agency are neglected in providing internet like facilities to the masses for making them well-informed citizens. The researchers propose that building educational institutions and equipping them with the internet related technologies can play an important role in making people familiar with the usage of these technologies leading towards the change in the stereotypical attitudes. Consequently, it may produce an informed citizenry. Furthermore, both the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should start a special campaign for presenting the internet as a something positive and useful for the individuals as well a society, thus convincing males dominated society to allow females members of tribal society to use it.

In addition, the government should provide subsidies to computers and internet related packages to make it easier for people to access the internet, subsequently, eliminating discriminating attitudes towards females regarding their use of the internet. Also, internet providers such as Wateen, Witribe, etc. should be encouraged to provide services in Khyber agency like urban areas of Pakistan. Moreover, the government should make information technology (IT) labs and provide scholarships to females. This will encourage those segments of the masses particularly females who cannot peruse their education because of poverty and

dependence on the males. The government scholarship and other women empowerment campaigns can help to bring these females to the mainstream population of the country. Hence, this government-owned initiative can empower and encourage females segments of the populace of poverty-ridden and neglected Khyber agency regarding their education, access to information technologies, and create in them the hope of self-dependence.

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