Social Networking and Women's Agency: The Role of Social Media among Pakistani University Girls Students

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ABSTRACT Women's agency in Pakistan is oppressed both in private and public space. The study finds out the usage of cyberspace and cyber culture among university girl students in Mardan. The second objective is to investigate the association of cyberspace and women's agency in promoting women thoughts and challenging male authority. A quantitative cross sectional study design is used with simple random sampling techniques and data are collected through questionnaires from 200 currently enrolled university girl students. Binary logistic regression shows that the odd ratio is 2.271 times higher among frequent social media users to criticize government policies against women rights (P-value .001). Similarly the odd ratio is 3.873 times higher among women frequently using social media for social networking with people without physical involvement (P-value .000). It is concluded that cyberspace empowered women's agency in sharing their issues, thoughts and challenging male authority without occupying physical space.

INTRODUCTION

In Pakistan women comprise nearly half of the total population but their agency is oppressed and disadvantaged as compared to men (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2017). In the country women are confined to the domestic sphere with limited physical sphere activities within the society. It is revealed that women are restricted from their equal physical participation in public and private spaces including political representation, access to education, health and decent employment (Chatha et al. 2014; Zakar et al. 2013). It is stated that women's agency in developing countries have the ability to share their choices, thoughts, social networking and communication with others but they have limited opportunities in the physical space as compared to men (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach 2008). In Pakistan and other developing countries women are treated subordinate with limited decision making authority (Sultana 2010).

In the country men are the key decision makers in both public and private sphere due to which women are unable to challenge the thoughts and male authority. In Pakistan due to patriarchal structure of society and male dominance women mobility and social networking with other women and supporters is discouraged. It is highlighted in many research studies that women are facing continues gender discrimination in protecting their rights and raising their voice for women empowerment (Andersson et al. 2010; Ali and Gavino 2008). Men in the country control and exercise power in both private and public space with an oppressive approach towards women's agency (Pyke and Johnson 2003). In male dominant societies with no exception to Pakistan women rely on the well and choice of their men family members regarding their mate selection, access to education, employment and participation in political affairs (Ali 2020). One of the serious public health issues among women is their dependency on husband choice in decision of sexuality, child birth time and spacing (Ali et al. 2016; Bohren et al. 2014). Women's agency is systematically oppressed and subordinated in the public and private sphere. The materialist thinking and men as main actors of economic affairs is one of the main barriers to gender equality and women empowerment (Ferree 2002). Women decision making is discouraged and very minimal about her liberty, independence, and health, economic and political engagement in society is permissible (Hadi 2017; Jejeebhoy and Sathar 2001). In developing countries women and men differ in their ability to

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make effective choices in a range of spheres, with women typically at a disadvantage. Women and men have unequal opportunities to exercise their agency (Andersson et al. 2010; Ali and Gavino 2008). Agency is the ability of an individual to make effective choices and to transform those choices to desired outcome (Paternoster et al. 2015).

In the post materialist era with modernization the importance of cyberspace is widely increased and recognized. It is worldwide acknowledged that cyberspace enables an individual agency to make effective choices and transform those choices to desired outcome (Youngs 2004). According to the fourth wave feminist perspective digital technology and use of internet is one of the powerful tool to challenge the male dominant sphere and raise voice against gender discrimination and women oppression. Cyberspace is the new medium of communication which arose through the global interaction of digital technology. Cyberspace is a space where individuals are connected with one another without physical interaction. Women are also part of cyberspace and it is considered a safe and powerful space for women's agency. In most parts of the world women's agency is oppressed and restricted from physical interaction to share their thoughts and wisdom (Ardener 2021). The cyberspace provides a great opportunity to women to share their views and to criticize male dominancy and gender discrimination. With the growth of cyberspace the cyber culture is developed which is comprised of a set of technologies, materials and intellectual practices, attitude, mode of thought and values (Youngs 2004).

In cyberculture, people from several places with pretty different cultures, values of all societies and habits, co-exist and communicate. Cyber culture has utterance by practices included but not limited to global sharing, distributed creation, social networking, streaming, mass collaboration and social bookmarking. In cyberculture people share their thoughts, allowing others to know and to integrate them (Pilwha 2003). Therefore, users who are far away geographically can be closer by sharing a message through the multiple tools or devices available. In Pakistan like other countries, women's agencies are playing a great role in cyberspace with challenging physical space and continuously

developing a cyber-culture. Women's agency in Pakistan discusses the issues of masculinity and femininity in cyberspace without physical engagement. This cyberspace is created by computer systems without physical presence. Women's agency in the country is part of cyber culture and shares their thoughts, attitudes and issues which were not allowed in the physical space due to male authority and power. Women's agency as part of cyber culture in Pakistan sharing the issues of gender discrimination, violence against women, challenging gender stereotyping role, sharing education material, raising voice for women decent employment and political representation, social networking and communication with women belongs to other regions and geographical locations, sharing their thoughts, criticizing government policies and challenging male authority in the country. Many researchers revealed that cyberspace and cyber culture promote gender equality and gender equity in male dominant societies. Women's agency develops various social networks and makes communication with advocates working for promoting gender equality. They share their thoughts and wisdom with human rights advocates which ultimately raise voice for women rights and equality in national and international forums (Youngs 2004).

Foucault's theory on power discussed that power is not a thing or a capacity which can be owned by state, society, social class or a particular individual, rather it exists between individuals and in different groups when it is exercised (Hartsock 1990). According to feminist perspective, women's agency is controlled and in physical space there are very few opportunities to develop social networks. But in the post-materialist era the Foucault theory of power greatly influenced the power which women exercised through digital media and social networking sites. The women exercised the agency by using digital technology which strengthened their voice and improved their social status. Foucault criticized the traditional power model that power is always negative and its consequences are oppressive; rather power is productive because it shapes forms of behavior, encouraging freedom of individuals. Foucault suggests that power is intelligible in terms of means and techniques through which it is exercised (Gallagher 2008).

In today's digitalized period of time, women's agency who are restricted from physical engagement and networking are encouraged through digital media and cyberspace to share their activities and raise voice for women rights and protection.

Foucault develops his views of power as productive rather than repressive. The power which is gained or exercised through social networking sites is not only because of repressing others, rather it is the way to bring gender equality and gender equity in societies where women are discouraged and discriminated against due to her gender and social position. According to Foucault's argument in the *History of Sexuality Volume One,* where there is power there is resistance (Foucault 1980). Women are facing resistance from men's agency during the use of cyberspace for social networking and communication with others without physical involvement. In the theory of power, Foucault highlighted the importance of technology which allows individual agency to work on themselves, their thoughts and their conduct. Through technology an individual agency can achieve a degree of wisdom and power (Wajcman 2010). In the modern time cyberspace is the main source which allows women's agency to develop social networking and achieve wisdom in their thoughts and actions. Similarly, with Foucault theory of power and cyberspace, the cyber feminist also argued that in cyberspace women's agency is freed from traditional physical networking and communication which is constrained in male dominant societies (Cudney et al. 2005).

Cyber feminism was coined in 1994 by Sadie Plant. The movement of cyber feminism grew out from "*Third-wave Feminism*". Plant, an important early proponent, has argued that women are naturally societal to using the internet, because women and the internet are similar in nature, both are non-linear, self-replicating systems exercised with making networks and connections. She argued that women's agency is freed from traditional constraints and are able to experiment with identity and gain new awareness for claiming power, freedom and authority. Her view of cyberspace is as a welcoming, familiar space for women, where they can and must seize opportunities to advance themselves and to challenge male authority (Plant 2020). In the fourth wave feminist theory it is focused to achieve greater equality by usage of digital technology.

It is stated that new digital technology and the internet created a space for all women without physical engagement which is the powerful source to challenge male authority and patriarchal structure of society.

The younger feminist is active on digital technology and internet see the internet as vital space for women to "Claim their Territory" and use it to gain power and authority in contemporary society. Cyber feminist consider internet as vital cyberspace where they can improve women status to advance these ends individuals and groups have created web site, discussion groups, and other online resources for women. These groups believe that women empowerment and power can be achieved through women greater knowledge of technology and its usage (Munster 1999).

Post-materialist theory as a development from materialism, notes the intergenerational change in value priorities. This theory argues that, as the economic needs of Western societies are satisfied and citizens become less interested in materialistic concerns, and instead more concerned about post-materialistic values (Stockemer and Sundström 2016). According to Kim (2006), cyber-culture is characterized by post-materialist value priorities. Internet users are more likely to be concerned about quality of life issues and self-actualization. Post-materialistic values-emphasizing individual freedom, self-expression, and cosmopolitanism-dominate cyberspace. The Post-materialists place greater emphasis on change in the existing modes of social and political operations (Kim 2006).

It is revealed in many other studies that digital technology and cyberspace is one of the fastest growing ways of communication and information sharing among individuals around the world. It is acknowledged that usage of social media is increasing and providing opportunities to all human's agency to make social interactions and negotiations within a network of different actors (Mendes et al. 2019; Keller et al. 2018). The central feature of digital technology usage is sharing information, social networking, and social relations among individuals. It is one of the technological advanced means of communication without affecting the privacy of an individual to raise voice for their rights in front of policy makers.

According to Madra-Sawicka (2020), in Pakistan during the period of March-2019 to March

2020 the user of Facebook are 92.67 percent among the people who are daily using digital social media for communication and sharing information (Madra-Sawicka et al. 2020). In Pakistan the women's agency engagement in digital social media is a growing industry which encourages women public space engagement and plays its important role in women empowerment in the country (Kasana 2014). The usage of social media channels Facebook and messenger WhatsApp owned by Facebook among women is an easy way of communication and networking with other individuals and groups. Women's agency makes communication and shares women related issues in various social networks without losing her privacy and identity. Usage of social media among women provided a safe room to users both in private and public space without influence from men counterparts (Madden et al. 2013).

Objectives

The authors focused mainly to investigate the usage of cyberspace and cyber culture among university girl's students in Pakistan. The study also focused on describing the association of cyberspace and women's agency in promoting women rights and wisdom in Pakistan.

In the present study, authors focused on research questions such as: How do a woman agency use cyberspace to achieve power and wisdom in Pakistan? How women's agency use cyberspace as productive mean to challenge gender discrimination and gain gender equality? How do women develop the cyber culture of social networking and communication to challenge male authority? How cyberspace and cyber culture strengthen women's voice and status from different geographical locations in the study area? How is cyber-culture productive and not repressive for women's agency?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In the present research study quantitative research design is used. Simple random sampling technique is applied to select the study sample population (Kirik et al. 2015; Brannen 2005).

Study Population

A cross sectional study is conducted with PhD, MS/MPHIL, and BS program enrolled girl students from faculty of social sciences, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan.

Sample Population

The present study is conducted in faculty of social sciences where the enrolled girl students are in less number as compared to boy students therefore the sample size of girl respondents is less. In faculty of social sciences there are 415 girl students enrolled in BS, MPhil and PhD programs. According to the sample selection formula of *Uma sekaran* the sample population is 200 therefore among the total enrolled PhD, MS and BS program girl students 200 enrolled girl students were selected (Fig. 1). In present research only those girl students are randomly selected as a sample population who are regularly using smart phones within the public and private sphere. In present research, data are collected from both boarding and day time girl students.
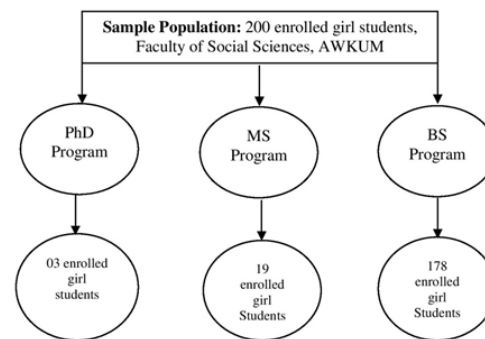

Fig. 1. Sample population selection
Source; Authors

Tool of Data Collection

Researchers developed a self-administered questionnaire as a tool of data collection with the help of extensive review of literature. The questionnaire is mainly divided into three sections: first section covered the participant socio-demographic information, second section covered responses about usage of digital social

media and women's social network activities, and third section covered women empowerment and protection due to active participation in social network activities. 3 Point Likert scale is a scale which is used to measure the opinion of respondents as agree and disagree while the neutral option is for neither agree and disagree responses in the particular study (Alexandrov 2010; Weijters et al. 2010).

Researchers used a 3-points likert scale to measure women's social network activities. In each variable 3-points of likert scale were indicated as frequent usage of social network, rarely usage of social network and never usage of social network. In the present study, researchers used 3-points likert scale to measure the attitude and opinion of girl students toward use of social media for social networking. The main focus is on frequent use and rare use of social media for social networking. It is also observed that some of the girl participants are holding a smart phone but they are avoid to use it for social networking.

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

Researchers used SPSS software for data analysis. Descriptive statistics are made to describe the targeted sample population age, family type, parental education, family headed household, family monthly income, area of residence, and girl students enrolled program, enrolled semester and holding of smart phone. In inferential statistics researchers used binary logistic regression analysis to measure the association between dichotomous binary variables and independent variables. The dependent variable usage of digital social media and social network is categorized into 0=No and 1=Yes while independent variables women's social networking and related activities is categorized on 3-points likert scale as women 1=frequently usage of social network, 2=rarely usage of social network and 0=never usage of social network. Women empowerment and protection dependent variable is divided into two categories as 0=No and 1=Yes. Researchers had taken verbal consent of the respondents.

Ethical Consideration

Sample population confidentiality and privacy is ensured during data collection and analysis.

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1. The present research study is conducted with girl students from faculty of social sciences, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan Pakistan. Among the enrolled girl students, 43.5 percent aged between 20-21 years currently enrolled in BS program, 41.5 percent aged between 18-19 years currently enrolled in BS program, 11.5 percent aged between 22-23 years currently enrolled

Table 1: Characteristics of girl students participated in present research study

Variable	F	%
Girl Students Age in Complete Years		
18-19 years	83	41.5
20-21 years	87	43.5
22-23 years	23	11.5
Above than 23 years	7	3.5
Family Type		
Nuclear	128	64.0
Joint	69	34.5
Extended	3	1.5
Parental Education		
Illiterate	115	57.5
Educated	85	42.5
Family Headed Household		
Women/Mother	23	11.5
Men/father	177	88.5
Family Monthly Income		
PKR 00001-10000	16	8.0
PKR 10001-20000	54	27.0
PKR 20001-30000	46	23.0
Above than PKR 30000	84	42.0
Area of Residence		
Rural	163	81.5
Urban	37	18.5
Enrolled Program		
BS	178	89.0
MS/MPHIL	19	9.5
PhD	3	1.5
Enrolled Semester		
4th	58	29.0
5th	45	22.5
6th	37	18.5
7th	29	14.5
8th	31	15.5
Faculty		
Social sciences	200	100
Boarding Education		
No	87	43.5
Yes	113	56.5
Holding Smart Phone		
Yes	200	100

Source: Authors

in BS and MS program in faculty of social sciences. The present study was conducted only with girl students because the study objectives mainly focused on use of social media among girl students. Therefore girls from BS, MPhil and PhD program were engaged as respondents of the study. Among the enrolled girl students, the majority, 64.0 percent were living in a nuclear family which is operationalized as a married couple with their unmarried children, 34.5 percent were living in a joint family system. The joint family system is operationalized as a married couple (husband and wife) living with their married and unmarried children while only 1.5 percent were living in an extended family system. In the study extended family is operationalized as a married couple living with their own married children, unmarried children, brothers and sisters of husband as well as the other in-laws members. Among enrolled girl students 57.5 percent of their parents were illiterate, and 42.5 percent parents were educated with very few parents having intermediate and above education. It is observed that parents are illiterate due to economic and other cultural factors. However due to establishment of the university in local district now they encourage their daughters to get higher education. Among the enrolled girl students 88.5 percent were living in families headed by father or other men family members, and only 11.5 percent of the enrolled girl students were living in families headed by mother or any other women. The study area is mainly patriarchal in its authority and men are the headed household.

Among the respondents 42.0 percent family monthly income was above than PKR 30000/M, 27.0 percent enrolled student family income was in the range of PKR 10001-20000, 23.0 percent of enrolled student family monthly income was in range of PKR 20001-30000/M, and only 8.0 percent enrolled student monthly income was in range of PKR 0001-10000/M. Parents of the students were engaged in various employments in the study district and other parts of the country. Among the enrolled girl students majority 81.5 percent are living in rural setting and 18.5 percent are living in urban areas. In the study it is statistically shown that the majority of the women belong to rural areas because the Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan is located in a district where the majority of the population is living in rural areas. Similarly, the students from other remote and mountain districts are enrolled in the university. Among the total enrolled girl students 89.0 percent were enrolled in BS program, 9.5 percent were enrolled in MS/MPHIL program, and 1.5 percent were currently enrolled in PhD program. The enrolled students in BS program were high in number as compared to enrolled students in MPhil program and PhD program. Therefore majority of the respondents were selected from BS program in faculty of social sciences. Current girl student enrollment was 29.0 percent in 4th semester, 22.5 percent in 5th semester, 18.5 percent in 6th semester, 14.5 percent in 7th semester, and 15.5 percent in 8th semester. All the enrolled girl students were selected from the faculty of social sciences. Among the selected students 56.5 percent were boarding students while the remaining 43.5 percent were day students. Among the study respondents, majority were boarding because they belonged to rural areas and there were transport issues on return to home. In the study, girls with current use of smartphone were selected to record their responses regarding the role of cyberspace and social media.

Table 2 shows the association of women's social networking activities and usage of social media, that is, Facebook and WhatsApp powered by Facebook. It is found in the results that women's frequent usage of social media to raise voice for women rights was (92.6% vs. 54.5%) with women not frequently using of social media. The cross table results show that majority of girls with smart phone and using social media were in better position to raise voice for women rights while the girls with no smart phone were not using social media to raise voice for women rights. The OR of women using social media frequently was 4.603 times higher as compared to women with no frequent usage of social media (OR 4.603, CI95% 2.554-6.921). It was statistically highlighted that women's frequent usage of social media is significantly in association with raising voice for women rights (P-value .000).

It is statistically shown in Table 2 that women's frequent use of social media both in public and private spaces for communication (70.0% vs. 48.4%) with women having no frequent use of social media. It is also shown that social media is one of the easy available tool for fast communication

Table 2: Association of women's social networking activities and usage of cyberspace

Women's social network activities	Usage of digital social media		OR, 95%, C.I	P Value
	No F (%)	Yes F (%)		
Voice Raising for Women Rights				
Frequently	12 (54.5)	165 (92.6)	4.603(2.554-6.921)	.000
Rarely	8 (36.5)	10 (5.6)	.981(.756-2.651)	.559
Never	2 (9.0)	3 (1.8)	1.00	
Using Both in Public and Private Sphere for Communication				
Frequently	16 (48.4)	117 (70.0)	3.873(2.170-6.222)	.000
Rarely	10 (30.4)	38 (22.8)	.892(.432-1.134)	.579
Never	7 (21.2)	12 (7.2)	1.00	
Political Engagement and Campaign				
Frequently	20 (41.6)	122 (80.2)	4.718(2.721-8.690)	.000
Rarely	17 (35.4)	19 (12.5)	.721(.413-1.728)	.510
Never	11 (23.0)	11 (7.3)	1.00	
Effective Mobilization and Discussion on Violence Against Women in Society				
Frequently	12 (30.7)	130 (80.7)	3.992(2.832-8.906)	.000
Rarely	18 (46.1)	21 (13.0)	.781(.502-1.610)	.670
Never	9 (23.0)	10 (6.3)	1.00	
Women Sharing Personal Experienced Issues With Privacy for Information and Action				
Frequently	45 (53.6)	49 (40.9)	.789(.987-1.983)	.059
Rarely	22 (26.2)	52 (43.2)	1.698(1.056-2.810)	.020
Never	17 (20.2)	19 (15.9)	1.00	
Campaign for Women Rights and Protection				
Frequently	21 (48.8)	125 (79.6)	2.871(1.881-4.125)	.000
Rarely	14 (32.5)	27 (17.2)	.970(.591-1.587)	.786
Never	8 (18.7)	5 (3.2)	1.00	
Criticizing Government Policies and Initiatives Against Women Rights				
Frequently	18 (50.0)	119 (72.6)	2.271(1.381-4.107)	.001
Rarely	11 (30.5)	32 (19.4)	1.425(.789-1.958)	.094
Never	7 (19.5)	13 (8.0)	1.00	
Creating a Platform for Awareness and Change				
Frequently	16 (61.5)	138 (79.3)	1.963(1.110-3.456)	.020
Rarely	7 (27.0)	24 (13.8)	1.431(.703-1.927)	.090
Never	3 (11.5)	12 (6.9)	1.00	
Communication with Family, Friends and Relatives				
Frequently	11 (55.0)	172 (95.5)	6.897(3.923-9.123)	.000
Rarely	7 (35.0)	5 (2.8)	.703(.489-1.661)	.891
Never	2 (10.0)	3 (1.7)	1.00	
Women Related Product Marketing, Advertising and Online Shopping				
Frequently	26 (54.1)	112 (73.7)	1.991(1.168-3.301)	.001
Rarely	18 (37.5)	36 (23.7)	1.597(.901-2.893)	.120
Never	4 (8.4)	4 (2.6)	1.00	
Formation of Reading Groups and Discussion				
Frequently	29 (54.7)	131 (89.1)	2.231(1.358-3.687)	.001
Rarely	13 (24.6)	11 (7.5)	1.119(.623-2.536)	.551
Never	11 (20.7)	5 (3.4)	1.00	

Source: Authors

and sharing information among girls with the smart phone. The OR of women's frequent usage of social media is 3.873 times higher than women with no frequent use of social media both in public and private spaces for communication (OR 3.873, CI95% 2.170-6.222). It is found in the results that women's frequent usage of social media is significantly in association with its use in both public and private spaces for the purpose of communication (.000). In Table 2 it is shown that women's frequent usage of social media for women's political engagement and campaign was (80.0% vs. 41.6%) with women with no frequent usage of social media. It is interesting to show that girls with smart phones were also using it for political awareness among general masses and also to express their political agenda. The OR of women's frequent usage of social media was 4.718 times higher as compared to women with no frequent usage of social media (OR 4.718, CI95% 2.721-8.690). The results indicate significant association between frequent usage of social media and women political engagement (P-value .000).

It is shown in Table 2 that frequent usage of social media among women was (80.7% vs. 30.7%) with women with no frequent usage of social media for mobilization and discussion on violence against women in society. It is one of the important roles of use of social media among girls that violence against women cases are also regularly reported on social media which divert the government officials and civil society attention toward violence cases. The OR of women frequent usage of social media is 3.992 time high as compared to women with no frequent usage of social media for mobilization and discussion on violence against women in society (OR 3.992, CI95% 2.832-8.690). The results indicate significant association of women's frequent usage of social media with women's effective mobilization and discussion on violence against women (P-value .000). It is shown in Table 2 that women with rare usage of social media sharing personal experiences issues with privacy for information and action was (43.2% vs. 26.2%) with women using social media frequently. Social media is considered the easy tool among girl students to share about the violence and other personal experiences to the wider audience. The OR of women rarely using social media is 1.698 times

higher as compared to women with no frequent and rare usage of social media for sharing personal experienced issues with privacy for information and action (OR 1.698, CI95% 1.056-2.810). The results show significant association between rare usage of social media and sharing personal experienced issues with privacy for information and action (P-value .000).

Table 2 indicated significant association between frequent usage of social media and women campaigning for their rights protection (79.6% vs. 48.8%) with no frequent use of social media. It is observed that previously women rights activist and feminist faced various life threats due to raising voice for women rights protection. However due to use of social media now girls easily share and upload any information related to women violence. The OR of women's frequent usage of social media is 2.871 times higher as compared to no frequent use of social media (OR 2.871, CI95% 1.881-4.125). The result showed significant association between frequent use of social media and campaign for women rights (P-value .000). Table 2 shows that women frequently use social media and criticize government policies and initiatives against women rights is (72.6% vs. 50.0%) with women not frequently using social media. It is very hard to criticize government for their policies and other interventions which are directly or indirectly related to women rights and protection. Due to the use of social media now it's become possible to record women concern on any law and program lunched by government which cause women rights violation. The OR is 2.271 times higher as compared to no frequent use of social media for criticizing government policies and programs against women rights (OR 2.271, CI95% 1.381-4.107). There is significant association between frequent use of social media and criticizing government policies against women rights (P-value .001).

Table 2 shows that women frequently use social media for creating a platform for awareness and change (79.3% vs. 61.5%) than women having no frequent use of social media. Among girls with use of social media it becomes possible to bring awareness among other women about women rights and pro-women laws. The OR is 1.963 times higher as compared to no frequent use of social media (OR 1.963, CI95% 1.110-3.456). The association is found signifi-

cant between frequent use of social media and awareness about women rights (P-value .020). Table 2 shows the association between frequent use of social media and communication with family, friends and relatives (95.5% vs. 55.0%) as compared to women with no frequent use of social media. Due to use of social media it becomes possible for women in traditional societies to communicate and interact with other women and even men without physical engagement. The OR is 6.897 times higher than women with no frequent use of social media for communication with family, friends and relatives (OR 6.897, CI95% 3.923-9.123). The association is found significant between frequent use of social media and communication with friends, family and relatives (P-value .000).

Table 2 indicates that majority 73.7 percent women are using social media for marketing, advertisement of things and online shopping. Among educated girls it is an easy way to choose any product and order it through online shopping. The OR is 1.991 times higher than no frequent use of social media (OR 1.991, CI95% 1.168-3.301). The association is found significant (P-value .001). Table 2 shows that women with frequent use of social media for formation of reading groups and discussion was (89.1% vs. 54.7%) as compared to no frequent usage of social media. The OR is 2.231 times higher than the frequent use of social media for formation of reading groups and discussion (OR 2.231, CI95% 1.358-3.687). The association is found significant between frequent use of social media and formation of reading groups and discussion (P-value .001).

Table 3 shows the association of women empowerment and protection due to usage of digital social media. In Table 3 the dependent variable is usage of digital social media which is presented in a vertical column in the table. The independent variable is measured with two indicators "No" and "Yes". In Table 3 authors statistically analyzed the relationship between women empowerment and usage of digital social media as "Yes". It is shown in Table 3 that majority of women with usage of social media promote feminist standpoint (71.6% vs. 61.0%) as compared with no usage of social media. The OR is 3.203 times higher than women with no use of social media for feminist standpoint promotion (OR 3.203, CI95% 1.825-5.412).

The high significant association is found between use of social media and promotion of feminist standpoint (P-value .000).

It is shown in Table 3 that usage of social media encourages gender equality in public spaces (67.5% vs. 60.0%) as compared to women with no usage of social media. With the help of cyberspace women's agency become able to claim gender equality in all sphere of life which are strongly discouraged in physical sphere for women. The OR is 1.872 times higher than no use of social media for encouraging gender equality in social space (OR 1.872, CI95% 1.153-2.873). The association between usage of social media and encouraging gender equality in social space is found significant (P-value .011). There is no significant association found between usage of social media and women's engagement in online economic activities. In Table 3 it is shown that usage of social media enhances women's political participation in various activities (62.0% vs. 52.0%) as compared to women with no usage of social media networks. The OR is 1.638 times high among social media users (OR 1.638, CI95% 1.089-2.291). The significant association is found between usage of social media and women political participation (P-value .015).

Table 3 shows that the majority of the women are using social media networks and they feel freedom, independence and liberty (73.8% vs. 56.8%) as compared to women with no usage of social media. Cyber space is a space of liberty and freedom for women where they can share their opinions and express their views on issue without any fear. The OR is 2.301 times higher as compared to women with no use of social media (OR 2.301, CI95% 1.873-3.588). The significant association is found between usage of social media and women independence, freedom and liberty information and participation in social networks. In Table 3 it shows that women's usage of social media facilitates intellectual and emotional company without having lost her identity in social network activities (67.4% vs. 57.2%) as compared to women with no usage of social media social networks. In the study area women interaction with men and outsiders of the family are not allowed but through social media in cyberspace they can easily interact and share their toughs with others without sharing her identity.

Table 3: Relationship of women empowerment and development of cyber culture in Pakistan

Women empowerment and protection due to social networking	Usage of digital social media		OR, 95%, C.I	P Value
	No F (%)	Yes F (%)		
Feminist Standpoint Promotion				
No	23 (39.0)	40 (28.4)	1.00	
Yes	36 (61.0)	101 (71.6)	3.203(1.825-5.412)	.000
Gender Equality in Social Space				
No	27 (40.0)	43 (32.5)	1.00	
Yes	41 (60.0)	89 (67.5)	1.872(1.153-2.875)	.011
Facilitate and Encourage Women Online Economic Engagement				
No	18 (35.0)	52 (34.8)	1.00	
Yes	33 (65.0)	97 (65.2)	1.429(.997-2.251)	.056
Enhanced Women Political Participation				
No	26 (41.2)	52 (38.0)	1.00	
Yes	37 (58.8)	85 (62.0)	1.638 (1.089-2.291)	.015
Women Feel New Freedom, Independence and Liberty				
No	19 (43.2)	41 (26.2)	1.00	
Yes	25 (56.8)	115 (73.8)	2.301(1.873-3.588)	.000
Intellectual and Emotional Company Without Having to Lose Her Identity				
No	24 (42.8)	47 (32.6)	1.00	
Yes	32 (57.2)	97 (67.4)	2.185(1.871-2.523)	.030
Attracted Public Attention on Women Related Issues				
No	18 (41.0)	53 (34.0)	1.00	
Yes	26 (59.0)	103 (66.0)	1.785(1.101-2.143)	.050
Easy Channel to Demand Justice for Women Rights				
No	17 (46.0)	54 (33.0)	1.00	
Yes	20 (54.0)	109 (67.0)	1.732(1.103-2.031)	.050
Encourage Women to Challenge Gender Discrimination and Stereotypes				
No	21 (44.0)	43 (28.0)	1.00	
Yes	27 (56.0)	109 (72.0)	2.821(1.956-3.871)	.000
Build Relationship between Women as Citizens and Government Machinery				
No	17 (45.0)	57 (35.0)	1.00	
Yes	21 (55.0)	105 (65.0)	3.797(2.501-5.899)	.001
Victims Women Are Helped and Protected				
No	10 (43.5)	58 (32.7)	1.00	
Yes	13 (56.5)	119 (67.3)	1.832(1.945-2.084)	.040
Women Have Easy Access to International Forums Working on Women Rights				
No	14 (38.0)	60 (37.0)	1.00	
Yes	23 (62.0)	103 (63.0)	1.331(.801-2.027)	.429
Women Have a New Space to Speak Up and Be Heard				
No	25 (45.0)	51 (36.0)	1.00	
Yes	31 (55.0)	93 (64.0)	3.304(1.988-5.489)	.001
Speedup More Gender-Responsive Public Policies at Government Level				
No	24 (45.0)	49 (33.5)	1.00	
Yes	30 (55.0)	97 (66.5)	3.423(1.957-5.503)	.001

Source: Authors

The OR is 2.185 times higher as compared to non-user of social media networks (OR 2.185, CI95% 1.871-2.523). The significant association is found between use of social media networks and intellectual/emotional company without losing her identity (P-value .030).

In Table 3 it is indicated that women with use of social media networks attract public attention on women related issues (66.0% vs. 59.0%) as compared to women with no engagement in social media networks. The OR is 1.785 times higher than non-user of social media and its networks (OR 1.785, CI95% 1.101-2.143). The significance is found between women's use of social media networks and attracts public attention toward gender related issues (P-value .050). Table 3 shows that women's use of social media networks provides an easy channel to its users to highlight women's issues and demand justice for their rights (67.0% vs. 54.0%). The OR is 1.732 times high among social media users as compared to non-users (OR 1.732, CI95% 1.103-2.031). There is significance found between the variables (P-value .050).

In Table 3 it is shown that usage of social media networks among women encourage women to challenge gender discrimination and stereotypes in the society (72.0% vs. 56.0%). Through social media use, girls challenge the role which is socially defined for women as to perform in male dominant society. The OR is 2.821 times high among social media network users (OR 2.821, CI95% 1.956-3.871). The significant association is found between women social media network users and challenging gender discrimination and stereotypes (P-value .000). In Table 3 it is shown that women social network users make relationships and connections with government machinery for advocacy and lobby (65.0% vs. 55.0%) as compared to non-user of social media and its social networks. It is interesting to share that social media is not only a way of communication with friends and family members rather it is using as an advocacy tool to highlight women issues to government. The OR is 3.797 times higher among social network users as compared to non-users (OR 3.797, CI95% 2.501-5.899). The association is significant between social media network users and the relationship of women with government machinery for advocacy and lobby (P-value .001).

In Table 3 there is no significant association found between women social media network usage and victim women help. Similarly no association is found between women social media network usage and women have access to international forums working on women rights. Table 3 indicated that women's use of social media networks provide women a new space to speak up and be heard (64.0% vs. 55.0%) as compared to non-user of social media networks. The OR is 3.304 times higher among social media network users as compared to non-users (OR 3.304, CI95% 1.988-5.489). The association between women social media network users and a new space for women to speak up and be heard is found significant (P-value .001).

In Table 3 it is shown that women users of social media networks speedup government initiatives for gender responsive public policies (66.5% vs. 55.0%) as compared to non-user of social networks. The women's agency is empowered to push government and other departments to initiate various programs for women development and protection in the country. The OR is 3.423 times high among social media network users as compared to non-users (OR 3.423, CI95% 1.957-5.503). The association between women social media network usage and speedup gender responsive public policies at government level found significant (P-value .001).

DISCUSSION

Women's agency is oppressed in the patriarchal structure of society to make physical communication and relation with other individuals and groups of people. In traditional societies and patriarchal structure of authority women are discouraged to take part in public sphere activities (Sultana 2010). They are facing an interlock system of oppression due to their gender, class and caste to perform an effective role and gain the desired outcome with physical communication and social networking. In male dominant societies due to general role women are compelled to play their role within four wall of their house and their interaction is strongly discouraged outside the home with other women and men (Ali 2020). One of the black African American feminist Patricia Hill Collin also discussed in her theory "Interlock System of Oppression"

that women's agency is discouraged to perform an effective role in public space with physical interaction (Collins 1998). It is discussed by Dickson and Louis (2018) that women face gender discrimination in public space which limits women's agency proficiency and capability to make communication and relation with others.

It is statistically shown that cyberspace and social media is one of the powerful tools to encourage women social networking and sharing their issues with others without their physical involvement (Chetty and Alathur 2018). The present study discussed that women's agency play a vital role in cyberspace with the usage of media technology and internet. The cyberspace is considered a productive source among women to challenge the male authority and share their wisdom (Garcia Gomez 2010). Similarly it is also acknowledged that women are free in cyberspace to share their concerns and opinion related to any issue which is directly or indirectly affecting their status and social position (Skalli 2014). Foucault also discussed in his theory of power that in the post-materialistic era the priority of individual agency is changed from economic gain to standard of life and liberty (Gallagher 2008). In his theory he discussed that digital technology and cyberspace is not always negative and repressive for women; rather it is productive and enables women's agency to achieve their desired goals (Foucault 1980). The present research study discussed that digital technology and internet provide a safe and non-physical cyberspace to women's agency where they can easily make connections and social networking with others from different regions and geography. It is also explored in other studies that due to technological advancement women also become able to post women related issues for wider sharing and recording others response on the issue (Hart and Mitchell 2015). Foucault discussed that usage of new technology and the internet is one of the sources of power which women can gain and use for gender equality (Wajcman 2010). It is discussed in a study that digital technology encourages women to criticize the gender discrimination and make social networks to strength women voice (Núñez 2011). It is discussed in the study that women's agency is concerned with the accessibility to education, decent employment, political representation and decision making. It is

highlighted in a study that social media not only provides opportunities to women agency to share women rights violation issues rather it is widely used as an easy source for getting education and decent employment (Duffy and Schwartz 2018). Plant, a cyber-feminist stated that new technology is productive and makes women able to share their concern with advocates of women rights (Stephan 2013). According to cyber-feminists, cyberspace pave way for developing cyber culture which encourages women to connect and develop social networking to advocate gender equality (Al-Kazi 2017). In the present study it is discussed that power which women gained due to use of cyberspace enabled them to raise their thoughts for women empowerment and rights. Women discuss the issues of violence against women and other harmful practices which cause gender discrimination in male dominant societies (Simons and Morgan 2018). In Foucault theory of power it is also discussed that digital technology shapes the individual agency and encourages individuals to share their activities (Gallagher 2008). It is also discussed in another study that digital media sites and the internet encourage women to share their point without highlighting their identity to others (Elena 2016).

In the present study it is highlighted that a women's agency uses cyberspace to promote a cyber-culture of social networking and challenge male authority and dominance. It is explored that social media empowered women's agency to counter men dominancy and oppression toward women in the societies where women are considered subordinate and inferior than men (Rentschler 2014). They criticize the gender stereotyping and discrimination in patriarchal societies. According to Foucault theory of power women bring gender equality with the use of cyberspace to discuss the gender discriminatory policies and intervention in the state (Nousiainen et al. 2013).

It is highlighted in the present study that usage of social media strengthens women's voice about women rights and issues they are facing from men. Their political and economic activities are increased without losing her privacy and physical contact with other individuals. In a recent study it is mentioned that social media is a powerful vehicle to bringing gender discrimination and women violence issues to wider

public and policy makers (Loiseau and Nowacka 2015). The empirical results of other studies stated that social media is the easiest tool to use against any women rights violation and raising voice of women for their rights (Rentschler 2014). According to cyber-feminist the younger feminist is active on internet see the internet as vital space for women to "Claim their Territory" and use it to gain power and authority in contemporary society. Cyber feminist consider internet as vital cyberspace where they can improve women status to advance these ends individuals and groups have created web site, discussion groups, and other online resources for women (Kennedy 2000).

Research studies revealed that usage of cyberspace has a positive impact on women's political participation and empowerment. Cyberspace allowed women to make network with other women and promote feminist standpoint (Dagona et al. 2013; Schuster 2013). According to cyber-feminist the women's agency are freed from traditional constraints and are able to experiment with identity and gain new awareness for claiming power, freedom and authority (Mohanty and Samantaray 2017). It is also found in other research that in European countries almost all women politicians are using social media during their political campaign. Usage of cyberspace and cyber culture for political campaigns reduces the risk of physical harassment and other threats to women in patriarchal society. Many research studies revealed that social media make it possible for women users to become actively engaged in political decision making and share a wide range of information with political actors (Stromer-Galey and Foot 2002; DiMaggio et al. 2001).

The present study statistically mentioned that women with their use of digital technology can easily criticize gender discriminatory government policies and programs. A study conducted in Saudi Arabia mentioned that women criticized the government on cyberspace openly and confidently during two peacetime natural disasters and its suffering (Al-Saggaf and Simmons 2015). Many research studies explained the association between usage of cyberspace among women as citizens and its interaction with government machinery. Recently it has become possible through social networks that citizens start questioning government policies and programs which are directly affecting human's agency and

their rights (Bannister and Connolly 2015; Andersen at al. 2011; Höchtl et al. 2011; Grönlund 2010). It is also discussed in post-materialist theory that post-materialistic values-emphasizing individual freedom, self-expression, and cosmopolitanism-dominate cyberspace. The post-materialists place greater emphasis on change in the existing modes of social and political operations (Inglehart 2015).

It is highlighted in the present study that usage of cyberspace and cyber culture encourages promotion of feminist stand point. It is considered as one of the major sources of freedom among women to talk and to be heard. A recent study by Pruchniewska (2018) discussed that usage of social networks among women strengthen their freedom to talk about women rights and issues. It is mentioned in the study that social networking spread information about gender discrimination and violence against women cases widely through social network sites. It is mentioned in the present study that usage of social media is one of the powerful channels to demand speedy access to justice in patriarchal society. In most of the countries women human rights activist easily and immediately report an incident against a woman to wider public for information and government for prompt response (Simons and Morgan 2018).

CONCLUSION

Women's agency in Pakistan and particularly in the study province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is discouraged and constrained to perform a vital role for gender equality and to reduce gender discrimination both in private and public spaces. The country is patriarchal in its structure and function where women's agency is restricted in physical space. Their physical interaction and communication is not permissible with other groups of people to share their thoughts, wisdom and issues they are facing both in private and public sphere. The study concluded that women's agency in Pakistan is actively engaged in cyberspace and developing a cyber-culture where they are sharing their thoughts and wisdom and at the same time challenging the male authority. It is also concluded that usage of digital technology and cyberspace play a vital role in gender equality. A women's agency uses it for social networking

and communication with individuals from other regions and locations without physical interaction. Usage of digital technology and the internet provided a platform to women users to enjoy their liberty and independence. Women political and economic engagement increased and they raised voices about women related issues to policy makers due to use of mass media.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study recommended that women should raise voice on social media networks about violence against women and pressurizes government law enforcement agencies and policy maker to take concrete step to end violence against women. The study recommended that women should form and join various feminist social network sites to promote feminist standpoint. It is recommended that through usage of social media channels women should take active part in political and economic activities in the country. It is recommended to use social media channels for criticizing all the laws, policies and program initiatives which are restricting women's agency in private and public spaces. The present study also recommends conduction of a qualitative research study for future researchers on the subject matter.

LIMITATIONS

In the present manuscript researchers mainly focused on quantitative research design with a limited number of respondents only from one university located in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan.

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