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Article:	**Qualitative Analysis: Impact of Social Media on the Psychological Well-Being of Pakistani Women**
Author(s):	Mr. Asif Khan Research Scholar, Centre of Excellence for Women's Studies, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan,
	Dr. Seema Manzoor Centre of Excellence for Women's Studies, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan
	Dr. Asma Manzoor Centre of Excellence for Women's Studies, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan
	Prof. Dr. Nusrat Idrees Department of Political Science, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan
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Author(s) Note:	Mr. Asif Khan is a Research Scholar at Centre of Excellence for Women's Studies, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan
	Dr. Seema Manzoor is serving at Centre of Excellence for Women's Studies, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan, Email: seema.manzoor@uok.edu.pk
	Dr. Asma Manzoor is serving at Centre of Excellence for Women's Studies, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan
	Dr. Nusrat Idrees is serving as Professor at Department of Political Science, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Today the use of social media has become part of our lives and it is no more bound by economic and geographical boundaries. It has now become the most effective means of communication across the globe. Its penetration and usage is spreading more rapidly in developing countries with a variety of uncontrolled health issues and other social disadvantages. It is also important to note that women face more problems and they are more prone to psychological disorders and social pressures. This study focuses on the Impact of social media on the psychological well-being of Pakistani women. This study is purely qualitative, based on content analysis and library research techniques by using primary and secondary data sources. The findings reveal that Pakistani women are bound to use selected online spaces due to the social and patriarchal setup observed through cultural norms and gender roles. If we conduct in-depth studies, then the empirical evidence can be explored to examine the psychological well-being of women in low-income nations and in Pakistan as well.

Key Words: Social Media, Psychological Impact, Well-Being of Women, Cultural Norms, Patriarchal System, Psychological Disorders, Social Pressures, Technological Advancement.

Introduction:

Social Researchers explore social changes that occur with time and provide updated facts in order to study society and its attributes. With the emergence of new technology and technological advancement, immense literature has been produced to have an insight into the effects and usage of social media. However, the psychological issues related to the use of social media are still not fully explored (Pantic, 2014). While conducting research on this subject, scholars aimed to explore the influence of media on users' psychology to classify the positive and negative effects on users' overall well-being. Since there are gaps in exploring all the possible aspects of impact on users; therefore, the empirical evidence provided by the research still needs more clarification. There is a gap between the questions raised regarding the issue and the literature, which should be unfolded to examine the impact closely. Best, concluded that there is a contradiction between the empirical evidence and the impacts of social media, especially regarding mental health issues (Best et al., 2014). It was also pointed out that research on the well-being and use of media lacks in developing countries and moreover the issues of women related to social media are not well presented in various research (Erfani & Abedin, 2018). Similarly, Lwoga & Sangeda, argued that in developing countries very limited facts are available to explore well-being on the basis of the role of media communication (Lwoga & Sangeda, 2018). Therefore, this study focuses on the impact of social media on users, especially women in Pakistan to analyze the emotional, psychological, and physical impact on women. Due to a lack of self-esteem and social well-being, women are adversely affected, therefore, they seek activities to escape from their environment and find for themselves an imaginary/virtual world of their own. Where they can be anyone or can do/say anything without having the fear of being judged.

Social Status of Women in Pakistan

According to the research scholars, it is not an issue in developing countries only, but women suffer from psychological problems all over the world (Mootz, *et al.*, 2019). In the regions like Central and South East Asia, women suffer the most from being highly patriarchal. In these countries, women suffer deeply from a lack of access to resources and are under-represented in all walks of life. Other than the patriarchal setup, false religious practices, cultural setup, and conservative environment together hampers women's well-being and contribute highly to women's submissive status (Urbaeva, 2019). Similarly in Pakistan, women face cultural biases, furthermore, women are subjected to domestic violence and harassment like in many other countries (Batool & Batool, 2018).

The evidence shows that violence against women and harassment has become a global issue and the number is continuously increasing (Madana, n.d). Women are deprived of getting an education, access to health facilities and employment in Pakistan like many other regions on the globe (Asian D., 2014). As per the empirical evidence from research by Ahmed in 2016, the mortality rate among women is high and women die during childbirth due to a lack of healthcare facilities. According to the census, almost 50% of the population in Pakistan is female but only 25 % of women are engaged in formal and informal economic sectors. Women's low well-being is caused by many factors like male domination, economic dependency, conservative environment, social attributes and cultural norms, domestic violence, and lack of access to rights Niaz (2004), and these cultural and social factors make women suffer both physically and psychologically more than men (Ahmed, *et al.*, 2016).

Access and Use of Social Media of Women in Pakistan

As per current statistics, more than 4.5 billion people around the world are using social media platforms and internet services (Alnoor, Wah & Hassan, 2023). This technological invasion has also penetrated Pakistani society and shows high trends in the use of technology at a mass level. The use of technology started in the 1990s and the transition spans from a slow dial-up connection to the present 4G and Wi-Fi technology. And it has now transformed into a better communicative social medium where people can interact easily and new opportunities and venues are open now. Sharing at all forums like social, political, and cultural are transforming gradually with time and changing global trends (Mustafa, 2018). People of all ages use social media, especially the young generation uses quite frequently, i.e. it has become a very important part of their life (Jamil, 2018; Eijaz, 2013). Though both men and women use social media, still in Pakistan online spaces are considered a male-dominated domain (Kasana, 2016). The fact sheet given by the Digital Rights Foundation in 2017 highlighted that almost 45% of female users in Pakistan face online harassment and cyberbullying. The most alarming thing is that many cases are not even reported due to the cultural and social setup in compliance with gender roles and social constraints.

Review of the Literature

Motives: Social Media

Use of social media has become a necessary part of our life and every individual has their own motive for using social media platforms. This variation depends on the choices, requirements, and perceptions of people, and it is very important to identify which medium a person is using and why because the consequences and effects depend on the medium choice (Valkenburg, *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, scholars have attempted to investigate the deeper meanings and in-depth information about the issue (Valenzuela, *et al.*, 2009). After several studies, scholars have listed the motives for the use of social media. The motives identified by these studies include seeking knowledge, investigation, observation, pass-time, entertainment, escapism, socialization, personality development, social exposure, self-personality portrayal, and utilization of a public platform (Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Shao, 2009; Stafford, *et al.*, 2004). Similarly, Sheldon (2008) has also identified some motives like becoming part of the virtual community, relationship building, fun, and companionship without judgment, many researchers have listed motives of using social media, like Sheldon, Park et al. (2009), has also given almost similar motives of Facebook use and other social media platforms. According to recent studies, many researchers have argued that other than fun and entertainment, social media is used for other purposes also, for example, strong relationship bonding, stress management, knowledge gaining, socializing, learning and etc. (Basilisco & Cha, 2015). Extensive research facts have verified that some motives remain consistent like, escapism, emotional and personal attachment, gaining knowledge, and socializing. The facts from the current study highlight that the use of social media impacts the psychological well-being of women in Pakistan.

Motives: Socialization

Socialization is a key feature of a humanistic society, people use different mediums to interact with each other and along with traditional ways people have now adopted new technologies as well. Socialization is not bound by the use of technology only, but research scholars normally relate socialization to the use of social media (Park, *et al.*, 2009; Sheldon,

2008). Normally people use social media to stay connected with people (friends and family) and it creates a sense of connectivity and reduces loneliness and boredom and impacts overall social well-being (Diomidous, *et al.*, 2016; Erfani & Abedin, 2018). Social media extend social circles and connect people through different platforms and people can stay connected closely (H.-T. Chen and Li, 2017). This feeling of connectivity improves the social well-being of users and they feel like having strong relationship bonds with each other. Socializing online provides better communication opportunities without a sense of shame or guilt of any kind. It provided not only emotional attachment avenues but also business and employment opportunities (Sanchiz, *et al.*, 2016). Since people do not judge each other on social media, therefore their quality of life, confidence level, and self-esteem improve on the whole (J. Chen, *et al.*, 2009).

Motives: Escapism

The concept of escapism can be used in many connotations as a revival mechanism to overcome the emotional stress and to avoid its harmful effects on an individual (Stenseng, *et al.*, 2012). In this context, we see media is used as an alternative or diversion to entertain oneself in an attempt to escape the distressed situation. Those who actively engage themselves in social media feel much more relaxed and for a time being they feel like living in a utopian world (Hastall, 2017). Out of all social platforms, Facebook is the best choice for people to reduce their worries and problems but basically, it builds a fake environment around a person which is not permanent in nature and this is not even a permanent solution (Young, *et al.*, 2017). Another research claims that escapism motive is a kind of psychological disorder that creates an imaginary world and takes away people from real life (Hassouneh & Brengman, 2014). Though people feel relaxed, several studies show that escapism is not a solution, in fact, it is promoting depression and a sense of loneliness (C.-Y. Chen & Chang, 2019). Many studies have been conducted in this regard but still, none of the research has argued in favour of escapism, in fact, they claim that escapism in the longer run contributes to a negative impact on a person's social and psychological well-being.

Motives: Personal

Like many other motives, personal motive also reflects the personality of a person Park, *et al.* (2009), self-projection, self-exposure, identity, and coolness (Sheldon, 2008). Personal motives can be explained differently, and its core concept indicates that social media usage expresses an online image in a positive way. According to (Bailey, *et al.*, 2013) online exposure has positive effects on a person's social and psychological well-being and it helps in boosting self-esteem and confidence. Social media provides an opportunity for users to create profiles of their desire. They can even hide their actual identity, which helps them in maintaining their self-esteem without the fear of being judged (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011).

Motives: Emotional

People use social media to express their emotions and they share their personal information thus getting attached to people on social media to such an extent that people start sharing their personal details also without any hesitation is a very debatable topic (Dupré, *et al.*, 2019). Social media provides multiple ways of expressing emotions such as, through photographs, comments on others' posts, posting quotations and videos, etc. People even share their personal experiences related to events and occurrences by connecting to different platforms like Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, etc. (Waterloo, *et al.*, 2018). It is assumed that the emotional motive is associated with effective social and psychological well-

being (Weinstein, 2018). People share their both negative and positive emotions on social media and it creates a kind of mixed emotions and impacts users' psychological well-being.

Motives: Informational

The traditional way of getting information or seeking new updates on any subject of interest watching TV and reading the newspaper was the primary source and was considered important to stay socialized and it is known as traditional media (radio, television, newspapers) (Eveland, *et al.*, 2003). These traditional mediums are the essential motives for media exposure. Some researchers believe that media develops and changes social behaviours along with political, civic, and economic participation (Pasek, *et al.*, 2009). Some scholars have aimed to highlight the role of social media in politics (Gil de Zúñiga, *et al.*, 2017). Whereas Lee argues that social media impacts people's psychological well-being, not much attention is given to this domain (H. Lee & Choi, 2014). It may have a negative or positive impact i.e. it can disturb one's psychological well-being or can lead to improved personality and a person may develop problem-handling skills.

Social Media's Impact on Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being is a very complicated concept and it cannot be explained by any standard definition, but it is related to "optimal psychological experience and functioning" (Ryan & Deci, 2001). New media approaches have not defined the concept properly and multiple indicators are used to get a grip on the concept of well-being like happiness, anxiety and depression level, loneliness, satisfaction, and dependency on others in order to gauge the impact of social media on people's psychology (Burke & Kraut, 2016). Furthermore, according to Hogue's perceptions social media help in reducing loneliness, and hopelessness (Hogue and Mills, 2019; Park and Baek, 2018). Many indicators have been identified, but still, there is a controversy and lack of clarity regarding psychological well-being (Best, *et al.*, 2014; Pantic, 2014). The growth of social media has compelled research scholars to conduct research on the patterns of increasing use of social media and its prolonged online time and its impact on the psychological well-being of individuals and at the mass level. Some researchers argued that prolonged online time impacts users negatively Weinstein (2018), and as a result, it increases anxiety and loneliness among people (Oberst, *et al.*, 2017).

Some Facebook users revealed that their life is not as satisfactory as others because they try to find their happiness in an imaginary and virtual world (Vogel, *et al.*, 2015). On the contrary, some researchers have reported that the use of social media has reduced emotional and life satisfaction among users (Verduyn, *et al.*, 2017). Both negative and positive impacts are reported by various researchers; some have reported that people face emotional trauma after getting used too of social media, whereas another group of researchers has highlighted positive outcomes for example people get acquainted with people and become friends unconditionally without getting judged (H.E. Lee & Cho, 2018). As a result, either they become happy or are subjected to severe psychological issues (Nabi, *et al.*, 2013). People even get a chance to develop positive and sincere relationships Gonzales & Hancock (2011), and as a result, they become more confident to face life like others (Valkenburg, *et al.*, 2006).

Research and Based Conceptual Model

Women's inclusion the latest technology has become a most debatable topic and has appeared as a social issue, but still, some scholars argue that increased use of social media among women has improved their social and psychological well-being and gender inequalities

as well (O'Donnell & Sweetman, 2018). Therefore, in this regard, the ICT4D (information communication technologies for development) took initiative to increase women's inclusion in IT fields and thereby increase their access to use social media for their improved social status and well-being (Roberts, 2016). Ramsey claims that even after so many efforts for women's increased participation in social media for their well-being the research lacks in highlighting their positive role and the academic research focuses on women's self-projection, their body image, and the stereotypical role, further he added that unfortunately the impact of social media on women's psychological well-being is not properly addressed (Ramsey & Horan, 2018). Some researcher thinks that empirical evidence has validated that the use of social media is associated with psychological well-being but they have also identified that previous researches lack the representation, role, and participation of women in the latest technology and its impact on their psychological well-being along with causes that affect them negatively. Normally, research measures the restricted benefits of the social media in terms of its use between the friends and relatives and tests as the correlated variables with psychological well-being. And as a result, they come up with the fact that the variables appear to be happiness, level of loneliness, satisfaction, and self-esteem in relation to psychological well-being. Therefore, to fill up this research gap the current study has focused on the effect of social media on women's psychological health and well-being. This study has used the conceptual model and Gratification theory of media and Ryff's psychological well-being model (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Six dimensions have been focused on in this model: self-acceptance, personal autonomy, personal growth, healthy relationship, control of the environment, and life's motive.
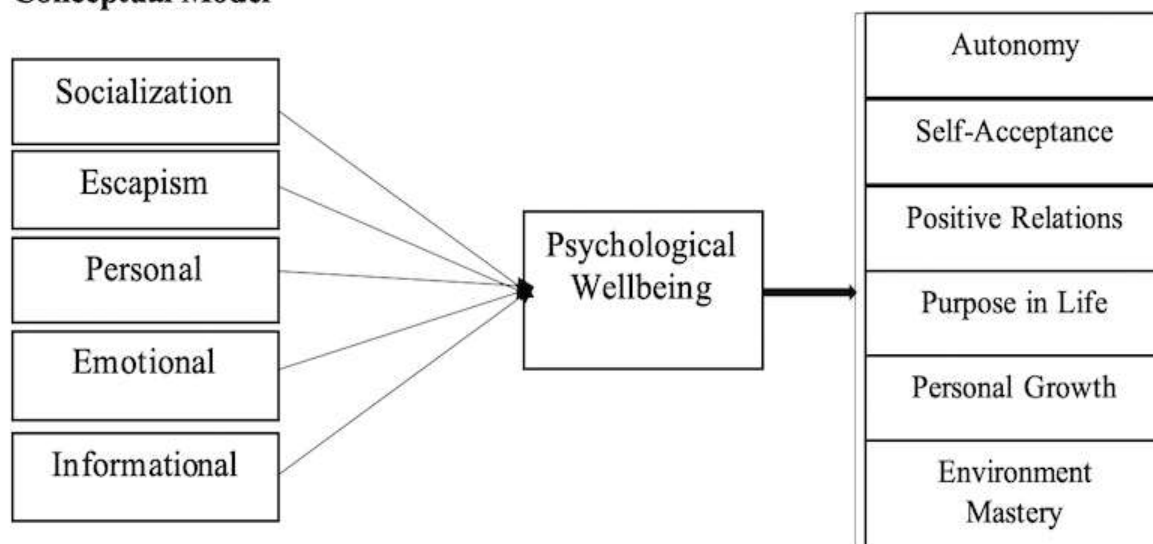
Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Hypotheses

In this study, following hypotheses have been formulized:

1. Escapism motive leads to psychological well-being of women
2. People use social media as a means to express their emotions without being judged

Methodology

"Analyzing Social Media's Impact on Psychological Well-Being of Women in Pakistan"

The study was conducted in the context of Pakistani society and culture. A qualitative approach has been used to collect in-depth knowledge about the Psychological Well-Being of Women in Pakistan. Qualitative research allows a researcher to assess the complex phenomenon to explore the non-numeric facts of diverse nature by using various techniques. Content analysis and library research methods have been used to gather meaningful inferences so that everyone can relate and can understand easily.

Purpose of the Study

The study focuses on highlighting social media's impact on *the* psychological well-being of Pakistani women. Therefore, the qualitative nature of the research was a wise choice of the researcher to examine the factors that are involved in the psychological well-being of women both positively and negatively.

Content Analysis

Content analysis in qualitative research is used to analyse the concepts, themes, meanings, and their relationships. To conduct research using content analysis the researcher collects data from texts (oral, written, or visual), which can be from books, newspapers, magazines, speeches, interviews, web content, social media content, films, and photographs, etc. Content analysis can be both quantitative i.e. statistical data and qualitative i.e. interpretation and understanding of several phenomena (Schreier et al., 2020).

Library Research

The library research technique is used to collect data after studying and understanding (books, theories, and documents) the material which is relevant to the issue, and this data is considered primary data. The researcher should examine the information carefully and it should be relevant in order to maintain the reliability and authentication of the data. The researchers should track down the data wide-ranged data constantly through a variety of sources and should also mention the source or data in the form of adequate reference (Allen, 2017).

Research Questions

1. What benefits women can get by using social media?
2. Do women find a permanent solution to their problems through social media?
3. Why social media is becoming popular among women?

Objectives

1. To find out why women feel safe in building connections with people on social media.
2. To find out the impact of social media on the psychological well-being of women.
3. To analyze the transformation of socio-political and cultural scenarios of Pakistani society due to social media.
4. To explore what are the barriers women face in the use of the internet.
5. To analyze how the escapism motive releases stress and tension by getting connected with people virtually.

Discussion and Analysis

This study has attempted to explore the gaps in previous research and in-depth analysis of the impact of social media on women's psychological well-being in Pakistan. In Pakistan, social media became popular in the mid-2000s, thus transforming the socio-political and cultural scenario of Pakistani society. Pakistan is ranked among countries with emerging internet economies and gender discrepancy is widespread. Unfortunately, in countries like

Pakistan lack of research is also a barrier to determining the penetration of social media use in society and the users are of all ages and social classes (Younus, 2018; Hassan, 2018; Hussain, 2014; Shabib & Fatima, 2012). The analysis shows that among women the motives of using social media are socialization, escapism, personal, and emotional but socialization motives show higher turnout among women and overall. Every motive has its own meaning and it depends on the user's perception as well. For example, the escapism motive refers to the release of tension and deviation from the monotonous routine in order to find pleasure by getting connected with people virtually (Krcaburun & Griffiths, 2019; Shaud & Asad, 2020). The escapism motive shows that women try to escape from their psychological issues i.e. an attempt to camouflage by using social media. Similarly, the personal motive shows the close connection between users and helps in self-presentation, whereas the emotional motive helps in the fulfillment of emotional needs. By using social media, women are basically found to seek diversion from the harsh realities of life, and they feel safe to stay connected with people without disclosing their identity (Hardaker & McGlashan, 2016). It is a common perception that women are bound to follow cultural norms and they cannot build their individual personalities (Tsegaye, *et al.*, 2018). Women are refrained from sharing their experiences Younas *et al. (*2020), Whereas, few researchers identify totally different perspective and argue that creating an online image leads to better and improved well-being and they seek emotional help and it is highly influenced by social motives (Erfani, *et al.*, 2016; Kim, 2014; Ko and Kuo, 2009; Naeemi, *et al.*, 2014). The personal motive and emotional motive show total contrast according to the empirical evidence. For instance, personal motives improve self-credibility, but women do not get space for personal growth and autonomy, and it also lacks in aiming a purpose in life, whereas the emotional motive shows a negative correlation with personal life and environment (Younas*, et al.,* 2020).

Conclusion

Social media has now become an important part of our lives; we connect and communicate with people through various platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. People of all ages and all professions use social media even for business purposes. Positive use of social media creates a greater impact on people and they share their experiences and emotions with their loved ones and even with complete strangers. Because they feel safe connecting with those people who do not judge them by any means. Social media provides the opportunity to stay connected through instant messaging, posts, images, and videos and is an easy way to get fame and recognition. It is a fast and effective way of getting updated information, in other words, we can say that it is the age of technology invasion and connecting people across the globe. Online business is preferred now, and online education has also become very common after the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital marketing and online learning have become very popular. Besides all these advantages, the major concern is that teenagers get addicted to the internet and they use social media for entertainment purposes rather than using it in a productive manner. Therefore, their activities on the internet should be monitored then only the media's use can show productive growth.

Social media is used on a daily basis and we spent most of the day on the internet. Therefore, we must know the advantages and disadvantages of social media use. This study has thus focused on investigating the impact of social media on the general public and the variation of their perception. It has also examined the positive and negative aspects of social

media on people using different platforms. The researchers have identified that social media has advantages and disadvantages both in accordance with its use and in Pakistan, for women, social media is a medium of psychological well-being. The study shows that social media has a strong connection with the psychological well-being of the user. According to several research, the available literature highlights that women's social media use is increasing in developing nations and is directly affecting their psycho-social well-being. It is also observed that women having low status, oppressed, or having psychological problems find relief and escape from all kinds of issues in life by using social media platforms, though this phase is temporary, still, it harmonizes the overall well-being of users. The researcher suggests that further studies should be conducted, especially in low-income countries in order to have a clear picture of the positive and negative impact of social media on the psychological well-being of women. This way, the hidden realities can be unfolded which will certainly help to identify the issues of women in a male-dominated society.

Limitations and Recommendations

Research is never exempted from shortcomings; therefore researchers have to work very carefully and ardently in order to address all possible limitations during the research process. To explore the facts regarding this study choosing a qualitative approach appears to be the most appropriate choice. It was noticed that research on the topic under study does not show the true picture of social media's impact on the psychological well-being of women in Pakistan. This study is an attempt to address the shortcomings and research gap as well. This study can help in studying the behaviour of social media users based on the content they explore and the mediums they use. Basically, first, we need to understand the true meaning and use of social media because it is widely misunderstood. It was not easy to gather data, because the majority of the respondents use social media for escapism and they build a virtual world around them, and this aspect becomes the biggest barrier in finding the facts and investigating that is it safe to use social media or to become part of it? Because normally people who get acquainted are like-minded or at least it appears to be so and they share, care, and exchange information and experience with each other. The highlighting disadvantage of using social media networking is that it lacks one-to-one correspondence and people have virtual socialization and it sometimes becomes very alarming because it opens avenues for identity theft of users. Since people communicate virtually therefore they can adopt anyone's identity and can portray themselves as somebody else.

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