Impacts of Social Media on Women's Psychological Wellbeing in a Patriarchal Culture

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ABSTRACT

The impact of technology on well-being is an emerging area of research but has thus far been limited in terms of sample, gender, context, and specific indicators of well-being. With more technologies coming into existence, new media research must expand and emphasize such ignored aspects as women, non-Western societies, and psychological, rather than subjective, well-being. To address this gap, the current research explored the implication of women's use of social media for their psychological well-being within the context of a patriarchal culture in a developing country. The penetration of the Internet and social media has brought educational, business, and other opportunities for the female elite in Pakistan. Even within Pakistan's higher socio-economic strata, the male-dominated society offers a woman limited options for free participation in political-economic or even social-cultural spheres. In-depth interviews with seven highly educated professional Pakistani women revealed both its positive and negative implications for their psychological well-being.

Keywords: social media; psychological well-being; non-western societies; women; pakistan; hedonic; eudaemonic

INTRODUCTION

The popularity and use of media have skyrocketed (Boulianne, 2015), gaining the attention of scholars who seek to gauge the effects of media on users' well-being, including their loneliness, depression, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and stress (Lupton, 2015, Siraj, 2018). These studies, however, have taken into account only Western contexts and Caucasian samples (Musarrat et al., 2017). Extant research has also focused predominantly on young adults regardless of gender, leading to an overwhelming sample of adolescent males. In fact, women are the most ignored sample group in ICT research (O'Donnell & Sweetman, 2018). Since the use of social media has proliferated among women (Hicks et al., 2012), and Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest have become the most popular social networking sites among them (Duggan & Brenne, 2013), it is imperative to choose women as a distinct sample population in social media research and assess the impact of social media on their behavioural patterns (Coleman et al., 2015). Therefore, the current qualitative study through in-depth interviews attempted to explore the effects of social media on women's psychological well-being in Pakistan.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

WOMEN IN PAKISTAN: SOCIAL STATUS AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

The socio-economic and political structure of developing countries generates few opportunities for women's education, career development, and socialization (Al-Asfour et al., 2017; Bhalalusesa, 1998) and they are given marginalized status in culturally restricted societies (Drucza & Peveri, 2018) where power is reserved for men (Habiba et al., 2016). The patriarchal culture in these societies ensures male-supremacy (Husain & Husain, 2018) and excludes women from public and private domains of life (Hadi, 2017). Despite continuous sexism struggles and legislative reforms by the Government of Pakistan, the undermined status prevails for women in the country (Moin et al., 2018). According to the Global Gender Gap Report (2018), Pakistan has failed to achieve gender equality, ranking 148 out of 149 countries. Since Pakistani society is patriarchal, women face severe culturally imposed restrictions and gender disparities in all fields of life, notably education, health, and employment (Afzal et al., 2013; Quayes & David, 2015; Usman, 2011). Consequently, the discriminatory social and cultural behavior toward females (Pascoe & Richman, 2009) contributes to their low psychological well-being (Acharya et al., 2010; Ali & Haq, 2006; Banerjee, 2015; Self & Grabowski, 2012). As such, women in Pakistan suffer more mental disorders and depression than men do (Bashir, 2018; Niaz, 2014).

WOMEN AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN PAKISTAN

Unlike the conventional media, the social media has neither a gatekeeper nor a monitor to provide access for women (Karolak & Guta, 2015). In collectivist and traditionally conservative societies, women are prohibited from engaging in external ties; nevertheless, the creation of new contacts helps women gain new ideas, information, and productive bonds (Gibson, 2001).

To some extent, social media has financially empowered Pakistani women (Ali, 2011), helped them escape isolation and traditional pressures, and given them the opportunity to raise their voice against gender-based violence (Guardian, 2017). However, women face discriminatory behavior on social media and are excluded from male-dominated social networking sites (Khan & Du, 2017). In the use of social media, there is a wide gap between male and female (Memon et al., 2015), with only 31% of women having access to the Internet and social media compared to 69% of men. Online spaces are thus dominated by males in Pakistan (Kasana, 2016). Another growing threat in the country is cyber harassment (Magsi et al., 2017) and according to the Digital Rights Foundation Report (2017), 40% of women face online harassment. This has resulted in fewer female social media users (Zahid, 2016).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study argues for the need to expand research on women and ICT beyond the superficial examination of access, frequency of use, and stereotypical presentation into the more meaningful realm of women's knowledge, empowerment, and psychological well-being, especially within the context of patriarchal societies like those typically found in the South Asian region. Therefore, given the entrenched patriarchal dominance in Pakistan's digital social sphere, this study aimed to explore and examine the interplay between social media use and women's psychological well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES AND WOMEN

In the late 1990s, dominant feminists viewed information and communication technologies as "male-dominated", and so the social structure in culturally patriarchal societies prevented

women's access to and use of new technologies (van Zoonen, 2001). The online environment was even termed 'problematic' for women at the time because of pornography, harassment, objectification, and other unpleasant experiences (Sherman, 1998).

To overcome these hurdles, feminists voiced their concerns and vigorously advocated equal participation of women in online spaces. Therefore, Spender (1995) challenged male dominance on the Internet by referring to online networking as a feminine attribute. Turkle (1995) also linked the Internet to women's attributes of community building, ethics, and communication. Further, the well-reputed feminist scholar Ellen Balka in 1999 held a debate called "the Internet as a women's medium" (van Zoonen, 2001).

Subsequently, scholars redefined the masculinity of the Internet to a more feminine ascription. The distinct demeanor and objectives of women on the Internet make it a women's world (VODW, 1999). Studies have found out that women's greater interest in personal interaction and support (e.g. e-mail, chat groups, and forums) develops personal relationships and closely connects online communities. In fact, more than threat, the Internet offers opportunities to women and enhances their communication skills, makes life easier, and broadens their vision (van Zoonen, 2001). Recently, the increasing number of women participants on social media has transformed their role from passive observers to active 'producers and distributors' of online content (Kanai & Dobson, 2016). Therefore, women are no longer marginalized in online spaces (Herring & Stroerger, 2014).

NEW MEDIA: A GENDER-ORIENTED PREFERENCE

An influential factor in media preference is gender (Idemudia et al., 2017), and gender as well as age and background can determine access to, activities on, and time for social networking sites (Idemudia et al., 2017). For example, scholars' examination of online communication behavior has revealed men to be more individualistic and women more communal (Morris, 2013; Zuckerman et al., 2016). Cultural and traditional practices also define online conduct in which men in general are more social, assertive, controlling, independent, rational, autonomous, and individualistic, but less emotional (Shifman & Lemish, 2011). On the other hand, women have been found to be more sensitive, emotional, expressive, empathetic, and vulnerable (Lemish, 2008). These socially and culturally determined communication behaviors are clearly replicated in the online communication environment (Frison & Eggermont, 2016; Haferkamp et al., 2012). Men also use social media for a longer time than women do (Boneva et al., 2003; Bujala, 2012), which can imply former are expected to be involved in the public sphere and the latter in the private sphere.

Since women's use of social media has increased in hours and numbers today (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Son et al., 2016; Volkovich et al., 2014), there have emerged gendered usage patterns. For instance, males use social media to make new friends, seek potential dates, and play games, whereas women use social media to maintain relationships, communicate, check on friends, post photos, share information (Rousseau & Puttaraju, 2014), post public messages (Muscanell, 2012), look for old friends, and keep in touch with existing ones (Boneva et al., 2003; Sohail et al., 2015; Son et al., 2016). It has, however, also been found that most women keep their identities and personal information hidden due to traditions, social pressures, security concerns, and privacy reasons (Idemudia et al., 2017; Junco, 2012; Mazman & Usluel, 2011). Additionally, women's desire and decision to use social media is more socially, rather than personally, influenced (Thelwall, 2008).

SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH AND WOMEN

Digital media and gender-based studies have identified gendered behavior and engagement patterns in online communication networks. Notably, social media research on women is

heavily focused on the negative consequences of usage, such as self-presentation, mental disorder, body image, self-comparison, and low self-esteem (Carrotte et al., 2017; Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; Paxton et al., 2006; Perloff, 2014; Ramsey & Horan, 2018). Indeed, social media upholds the stereotypical representation of females via the sexual objectification of girls (Bailey et al., 2013). The gender gap (i.e. masculine vs feminine) is further widened through self-presentation on social media (van Oosten et al., 2017). Studies have also reported women's greater indulgence in visual activities (Fardouly & Holland, 2018; Ramsey & Horan, 2018), such as posting appealing images, which negatively impacts their psychological well-being. In addition, more addictive activities are observed among women than men (Schou et al., 2017), while excessive media use causes higher rates of depression among girls than boys (The Guardian, 2019).

Nevertheless, women have been identified with certain positive outcomes of social media use, such as empowerment, authority, and autonomy (Papacharissi, 2010). Studies have also revealed the beneficial effects of social media on women's knowledge, emotional stability, self-esteem, and psychological well-being (Erfani et al., 2016; Hanna et al., 2017; Santini et al., 2015).

SOCIAL MEDIA AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Well-being has been conceptualized in various terms, such as welfare, individual well-being, subjective well-being, happiness, quality of life, and life satisfaction (Lutz, 2018). It is an umbrella term that refers to different evaluation courses of one's life or emotional experiences, such as positive affect and negative affect (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). The quantitative assessment of well-being is focused on "an individual's daily living conditions which are associated with his or her capabilities and opportunities to live a good life in a particular community or country" (Helliwell et al., 2009; Layard, 2010).

Kraut et al. (1998b) were the first scholars to address the psychological consequences of Internet use, affirming its strong effects on social involvement and psychological well-being. This pioneer longitudinal study measured psychological well-being as loneliness, stress, and depression. These indicators were reportedly worsened by Internet use because of users' decline in social involvement in terms of less family communication, smaller network size, and low social support (Kraut et al., 1998). This study paved the way for studies on the psychological effects of the Internet, with most researchers identifying negative impacts on the same indicators of psychological well-being. Resultantly, it gave rise to such concepts as Internet addiction (Young, 2004), isolation, cyberbullying, cyber racism, and low self-esteem (Diomidous et al., 2016).

Therefore, initially, a negative association was suggested between social media use and individuals' psychological well-being. Recent research, however, in examining the different uses and functions of social media, has discovered social media's positive impact on the six dimensions of psychological well-being (Chen & Li, 2017; Kim, 2017). Since the concept of psychological well-being is concerned with daily routine and life experience (Ryff, 1995), it involves people's day-to-day feelings and evaluations of their lives (Lyubomirsky & Dickerhoof, 2006). Following this reasoning, it can be assumed that daily experience with social media contributes to psychological well-being. Indeed, in the current era of technological advancement where digital technologies have become an integral part of life (Halapi & Tsitsika, 2017), technologies such as the Internet and social media are important factors that influence individuals' psychological well-being. As scholars have suggested that meaningful connections are pivotal for development (Reeve et al., 2004) and efficient social functioning (Waldo, 2014), social media, as a communication platform that establishes and facilitates

meaningful relationships (Mubarak & Mubarak, 2015), would lead to psychological well-being.

CURRENT RESEARCH

Media consumption is typically seen as a leisure activity. This view of media exposure describes the hedonic perspective, which associates media consumption and experience with pleasure (Vorderer et al., 2004). Conversely, leisure activity and entertaining experience are also positively correlated with eudaemonic experience, i.e. psychological well-being (Oliver & Raney, 2011). The eudaemonic perspective conceptualizes psychological well-being as not just the absence or presence of negative and positive affects (Ryan & Deci, 2001), but also self-determined behavior and psychological growth. Although various studies have documented hedonic effects of media use and exposure, the current study intended to fill the gap by contributing to the eudaemonic perspective of social media use. Therefore, Ryff's (1989) six-dimensional model of psychological well-being was adopted for this study.

Furthermore, in the context of cultural and women studies, research lacks conclusive findings on the effects of social media on education, health, and economy in developing countries (Sultana, 2015). In patriarchal and collectivistic societies, the digital gender divide still exists to a noticeable extent, with limited knowledge on the association between women's social media use and their psychological well-being (Lee & Choi, 2014).

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is a baseline study in Pakistan and offers deep insight into the association between social media use and psychological well-being among women in this patriarchal society. The study addressed the literature gap by looking into women's real-life experiences of social media and its effects on the dimensions of their psychological well-being. Given that social media use is rapidly growing in Pakistan and more psychological disorders are being reported among women, it is significant to empirically explore how social media contributes to their psychological well-being.

METHOD

STUDY DESIGN

For the current exploratory study, the researcher adopted a qualitative design. Through snow-balling techniques, women were contacted for interview. The sample size for the study was not defined and considering the saturation point, the researcher continued interviews. However, after five interviews, the author continued similar ideas and narratives with two more interviews, i.e., six and seven to find new aspects. Table 1 presents the information on the interviewees.

TABLE 1. Demographics of Participants

Name	Education	Marital Status
W-1	Ph.D. in Economics	Married
W-2	Ph.D. Chemistry	Married
W-3	Ph.D. Education	Married
W-4	Ph.D. Psychology	Married
W-5	Ph.D. Accounting	Unmarried
W-6	Ph.D. in Economics	Married
W-7	Ph.D. in English Language	Married

INTERVIEWS

Each interview was conducted and recorded and transcribed. For the purpose of confidentiality, only codes with dates and places were mentioned in the researcher's record. The interviews followed ethical codes and were conducted upon receiving the participants' signed informed consent. During the interview, the participants were not forced to explain further if found hesitant to speak about an incident. The core question of the study, however, was reiterated several times to elicit accurate data and real-life experiences from the participants. Though the native language of the participants was Urdu, the interviews were conducted in English. Any words and phrases spoken in Urdu were repeated in English by the participants upon request so as to avoid translation bias by the researcher.

Notably, as all the participants were university fellows of the main researcher, the participants openly and generously shared their real-life experiences and thoughts about social media use and their psychological well-being. Initially, the participants were given some explanation about the concept and each component of psychological well-being (i.e. autonomy, positive relations, purpose in life, personal growth, self-acceptance, and environment mastery) so that they could relate their social media use to specific outcomes of well-being.

The interview started with basic questions about social media use. The initial questions were related to social media and online activities; however, they were gradually aimed at the effects of social media on their wellbeing.

FINDINGS

The data was analysed by means of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first author read each interview transcript several times to gain familiarity with the data and highlighted important sections, adding some comments in the margin to explain the views of the participants. The multiple times of reading and commenting helped the authors identify the themes and their relationships. Coherence between the participants' narratives was maintained by examining similarities and differences.

Since this was a baseline study in Pakistan and there was no or little prior knowledge on the topic, the qualitative thematic analysis procedure further involved a combination of techniques, such as content analysis, typological reduction analysis, and hermeneutical/rhetorical interpretation (Fisher, 1987; Kvale, 1996; Mayring, 1990; Weber, 1990). These techniques provided fruitful insights and an in-depth understanding of the data (Patton, 1990).

SOCIAL MEDIA USE

All the seven participants are active users of social media and spend an average of three to four hours online. Since they use social media on their mobile phones, they check their social media at every notification alert. Four participants are active users of three social networking sites, namely Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn, in descending order of preference. The remaining three participants reported using five social networking sites, including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and SnapChat, again in descending order of preference. Among the seven participants, no one admitted using social media conveniently, narrating that their social media use was influenced by cultural factors. The participants maintained that social media facilitated knowledge acquisition and goal achievement, but these beneficial roles of the social media are often undermined by visual activities and socialization.

Overall, by means of qualitative analysis techniques, the negative and positive effects are categorized in some major themes as given in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Themes

Codes

Positive Effects on Psychological Wellbeing	Socialization, strengthening contact
	Academic affiliation, knowledge enhancement
	Information about the latest opportunities, managing online responses, coping with online behavior
Codes	
Negative Effects on Psychological Wellbeing	Lack of independence, fear of online harassment
	Wastage of time, leisure activities
	Self-comparison, addiction to online appreciation, virtual fantasies

As can be seen in Table 2, the themes were grouped into two categories to identify the negative and positive contributions of social media to women's psychological well-being.

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON WOMEN'S PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING

According to the participants, their main reasons for using social media are socialization, extension in contacts, and development of positive relations with other people. One participant is quoted below:

"In Pakistan, for women, social spaces are very limited and biased, so they are not allowed to talk to anonymous people. But thanks to social media, we can now communicate even with non-acquaintances, and at times, a casual talk results in a good trustworthy relationship…many times I experienced and found good pieces of advice from online contacts instead of personal relatives or friends."

Another participant said, "… *it all depends on users; for me social media is a blessing. Through social media, I came to know about a scholarship, and Alhamdulillah, I got it. Social media really contributed (positively) in my life.*"

Following this, a participant labelled social media platforms as a source of opportunities. She explained, *"I must say, social media is full of opportunities for careers, education, and life as well. In my education and career, social media helped me a lot."*

Since the participants were educated and employed, they referred to social media as a "*must*" in the present time. By keeping them updated with the latest happenings, social media aids them in their educational and professional domains, in addition to contributing to their personal growth.

In particular, the participants repeatedly linked social media use to their positive relationships and environmental mastery. Two participants even recommended social media use for Pakistani women who typically had limited options for socialization. One of them expressed:

"…. you know, women are kept within four walls; therefore, more mental issues are reported among women. Through social media, we can contact people, and we can share and seek advice. Not all bad people use social media; you can find good ones, too."

The participants also highlighted the role of social media in their psychological well-being and shared it over time and that new media technologies facilitated their self-development and growth as described below:

"… every day, you learn and find a new person within you. Well, there are many factors, but social media is the strongest factor. As we are 24/7 online, and we have a mobile in our hand, each beep keeps us updated. We learn, and social media really keeps this learning process at a more advanced level."

Another participant shared, *"I was not good in general knowledge when I enrolled in CSS exams. I found a CSS group on Facebook and it changed my life. It really, really, helped me."*

While pointing to cultural issues, one participant said, *"being a woman, the society and system do not provide us with many options to develop and progress, but the advantage of being on social media is access to all options with no hindrance."*

Overall, to emphasize the effects of social media on psychological well-being, the participants unanimously agreed it was helpful and constructive.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON WOMEN'S PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING

The participants also said that in Pakistan, though social media is used by women, there are cultural factors and pre-set societal norms that define communication patterns and association preferences on SNSs. The participants thus rejected the effects of social media on the autonomy of women. They sated that women were deprived of this fundamental right of decision making. Despite holding no official position in society, they have to think twice or thrice before posting on social media, as portrayed in the following quote:

" … *women's autonomy is still a dream in Pakistan. Education, career, and family position do not matter. The woman is a woman, so rules are defined for us. We do have our opinion, but we cannot express it the way we wish to. Many times, we face problems and want others to know them, but we have to stay silent.*"

Another participant said, " …. *our lips and hands are tied by cultural values. Unfortunately, all these values are for women in Pakistan. Men can say and express whatever they want or wish… but, being women, we have to think of consequences."*

It is true that social media imparts education and makes women aware of their rights. In fact, various online movements have taken place in Pakistan to advocate the rights of women. Despite such progress and women's increased utilization of available media technologies, cultural restriction and the male-dominated society impose inhumane restrictions on women.

A participant said, "…. *expressive women are not tolerated in Pakistan. I supported the women's march but trust me, even a lot of my educated contacts raised questions and tried to correct me. They all said this was non-Islamic; they did not support it… even a few threatened me. Some of my male friends used unethical words."*

Next, the participants discussed the negative effects of social media on their self-acceptance, terming it 'dissatisfaction with body and life'. According to the participants, social media increases avenues for gossip and showing off among women. On social media, women compare themselves with each other and feel more and more dissatisfied with themselves. For example, some women post amazing pictures and others admire their status or looks. This is quoted below:

"*I think, as far as self-acceptance is concerned, for women, social media is cultivating a so-called ideal life and body image. We have our strengths, but visual representation is exerting negative influences on our emotional and psychological health.*"

One participant said, "*I know what I am, but people don't know my achievements. They just judge me by my looks. Sometimes, I feel down.*

This sentiment was echoed by another participant: "*Everyone has weaknesses and strengths, but social media is more visual; therefore, more emphasis is given to pictures. If I post any accomplishment, I receive very few likes and comments, but pictures get hundreds of likes in a few minutes.*

Moving on, the participants maintained that the purpose of life has become to share something on a daily basis, as one said, "*I know what the purpose of my life is but social media and other activities take most of my time.*"

DISCUSSION

Seven in-depth interviews were conducted with Pakistani women to understand and explore the effects of social media on the psychological well-being of women. The participants' accounts highlighted a range of experiences related to their social media use and its impacts on psychological well-being in the traditionally male-dominant Pakistani society. The emergent themes were clustered broadly into two categories: positive and negative effects of social media on women's psychological wellbeing.

Considering the complexity of the psychological well-being construct, scholars recommend its examination in different cultural contexts (Hefferon et al., 2017). Therefore, the current study followed a qualitative research design to observe cultural norms and traditional practices using the interview method. The narratives divulged by the participants indicate that women's well-being remains a question in Pakistan despite the expansion of education, policies, and technologies. Culturally-imposed restrictions still influence their socialization (offline and online) and negatively impact their psychological well-being. The narratives also emphasized that the digital divide was based on gender and that the elimination of this divide would foster the well-being of a marginalized segment of society, i.e. women.

Although social media has opened new avenues for women (Karolak & Guta, 2015), traditional and conservative societies still exercise social restrictions on women (Gibson, 2001). Correspondingly, despite worldwide social media use, gender gaps and imbalances exist in the context of Internet and social media use due to culture, society, and social stereotypes (Munusamy & Ismail, 2009). In line with this, the participants reiterated the significance of social media for informational, educational, and knowledge-seeking purposes, but simultaneously they recalled the social norms which prohibit them from being autonomous and expressive online. It appears that autonomy is still associated with men (Eagly & Kite, 1987; Petronio & Martin, 1986; Shifman & Lemish, 2011). Though some studies in the Western cultural context have reported the positive impact of social media on women's autonomy (Papacharissi, 2010), the current study, conducted in a patriarchal Eastern context, reveals opposite results. This indicates that cultural influence drives women to be submissive. Consequently, women can neither utilize their full potential nor raise their voice for their rights; their level of psychological well-being thus remains low. The participants even narrated several incidents of their problematic experiences (Sherman, 1998) when they spoke out for a cause.

Moreover, the participants shared the negative consequences of social media on self-acceptance due to the visual nature of the platforms (Fardouly & Holland, 2018; Ramsey & Horan, 2018). When comparing themselves with others, they occasionally feel bad about themselves and fail to appreciate their individuality. On the other hand, the findings of the study also support the positive impacts of social media, such as enabling women to develop more positive relations despite cultural restrictions (Ali, 2011). Positive relationships help women escape the traditional pressures of isolation and segregation. Extension in contacts permits them to express themselves and feel socially secure and hence contributes to their psychological well-being.

Ultimately, the findings of the study reinforce the influential contribution of culture to women's social media use and psychological well-being with regard to gender roles (i.e. masculinity), relations (i.e. collectivism), and inequality (i.e. power distance). The participants' narratives reflect that defined gender roles and behaviors are followed online, as women restrict their expressions, cautiously post their opinions, and avoid visual sharing. In addition, they limit themselves to known contacts, secretly extend their online networks, fearing that they are monitored by the family. This denotes the masculine culture of Pakistan and its disparities in gender roles, expected behaviors, and power distance (Islam, 2004). These cultural and normative beliefs were thus evident among the participants, while their reference to cultural settings showed strong cultural impacts.

Although the participants in the current study belong to a higher socioeconomic and educational level, their narratives do not just reveal the important role of social media for psychological well-being but also affirm cultural impacts on their social media use and psychological well-being. The findings suggest that when online, they face hidden issues like discriminatory behavior and fear that can adversely influence their psychological well-being (Montero et al., 2011). This is consistent with findings from the developing region of the world where prevailing discriminatory social behaviors immensely impact social media use and psychological well-being (Acharya et al., 2010; Ali & Haq, 2006; Banerjee, 2015; Pascoe & Richman, 2009; Self & Grabowski, 2012). The in-depth interviews, therefore, successfully reveal and generate a fruitful discussion about the dual impacts of social media in cultural contexts. The findings may also provide answers to why women in South Asian countries, despite using social media, do not take maximum advantage of technologies to enhance their psychological well-being. Overall, the findings support the study's conceptual model that social norms and gender roles influence social media use and women's psychological well-being. Therefore, it has been revealed that there is a dual role of social media for women in the Pakistani context. Although social media transforms the lives of women to some extent, cultural and traditional norms inevitably lead to their low psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

Academic research on social media use in Pakistan has mainly focused on youth, with most study samples being dominated by males. Unfortunately, considering the social and cultural environment where new media technologies can bring social change, address stereotypical notions, and resist discriminatory behaviour against women, the focus on women in new media research is absent. The present study was thus an effort to explore the contribution of social media to women's psychological well-being in a patriarchal culture. Notably, this study affirms that socially and culturally constructed behaviours determine online behaviour (Zuckerman et al., 2016), which defines online identity and conduct, and that men are assertive, independent, and autonomous when online whereas women are emotional and submissive (Lemish, 2008; Shifman & Lemish, 2011). This indicates the replication of socially expected behaviour in the online environment (Frison & Eggermont, 2016).

Overall, online freedom (Karolak & Guta, 2015) is still a dream in patriarchal cultures. Online male dominance (Hadi, 2017; Husain & Husain, 2018) makes women's virtual experience problematic, causes fear of online harassment, invades their privacy, and forms low self-esteem (Idemudia et al., 2017; Junco, 2012; Mazman & Usluel, 2011). These effects would be far more severe for less educated women who are from low socioeconomic backgrounds and have restricted access to technologies.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the current study may motivate policymakers to make online spaces more democratic and balanced. In addition, stakeholders concerned with mental health may incorporate new media to manage depression and improve individuals' well-being, particularly among women in developing countries. Although the findings are mixed, the sociocultural context provides a beneficial conclusion and valuable insights for future studies.

As for limitations, this study was limited to seven interviews; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all female social media users scattered across various heterogeneous socio-cultural and economic clusters in Pakistan. Next, while the findings are useful in determining the trends and tilts of social media for women users, a more detailed study is recommended to categorize the existing and potential benefits of social media for the psychological well-being

of women in the South Asian context. Such wide-ranging studies can make better recommendations on how social media can realize a positive shift within a male-dominated society to transform women into effective users of social media based on eudaimonism. Furthermore, longitudinal studies may provide a deeper understanding of social media use for women's psychological well-being and would contribute to the evolving Information and Communications Technologies for Development (ICT4D) literature.

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