

## Impact Of Facebook Usage On Female University Students Of Pakistan: A Case Of Sexting And Harassment

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### Abstract

This research study attempts to identify and understand the impact of social media, specifically Facebook on university female students living in Pakistan. In-depth interviews have been conducted from 20 female Facebook user university students to know the impact. The findings show that Cyber bullying and sexual harassment prevailing online and involves in different activities like; sexting, stalking, blackmailing, abusive & immoral conversation and forceful friendships with fake identities that has a serious influence on female students. Pakistani women are often easy victims of such crimes and there suffering goes unreported. They tend to hide it from the society in order to guard their reputation. The study recommends strict punishments for such criminals in order to ensure security for women.

**Keywords:** Cyber Bullying, Harassment, Facebook, Females, Student.

### تلخیص

اس تحقیقی مطالعے میں پاکستان میں رہنے والی یونیورسٹی کی طالبات پر سوشل میڈیا، خاص طور پر فیس بک کے اثرات کو پہچاننے اور سمجھنے کی کوشش کی گئی ہے۔ اس کے اثرات جاننے کے لئے فیس بک استعمال کرنے والی یونیورسٹی کی ۲۰ طالبات سے گہرائی سے انٹرویو لیا گیا ہے۔ ان نتائج سے پتہ چلتا ہے کہ سائبر دھونس اور جنسی ہراسانی آن لائن پر غالب ہے اور اس میں مختلف سرگرمیاں شامل ہیں جیسے۔ سیکسنگ، ڈنڈا مارنا، بلیک میل کرنا، بدسلوکی اور غیر اخلاقی گفتگو اور جعلی شناخت کے ساتھ زبردستی دوستی جس کا طالب علموں پر شدید اثر پڑتا ہے۔ پاکستانی خواتین اکثر اس طرح کے جرائم کی آسانی سے نشانہ بنتی ہیں اور وہاں تکلیف کی اطلاع نہیں ملتی ہے۔ وہ اپنی سائبر کی حفاظت کے لئے اسے معاشرے سے چھپاتے ہیں۔ اس تحقیق میں خواتین کے تحفظ کو یقینی بنانے کے لیے ایسے مجرموں کو سخت سے سخت سزا دینے کی سفارش کی گئی ہے۔

کلیدی الفاظ: سائبر دھونس، ہراسائی، فیس بک، خواتین، طالب علم

## Introduction

Pakistani society considered conservative and traditional where religion is given much importance and people have to abide by its rules and regulations. The introduction of Facebook in Pakistan and an increase in its usage are clear evidence that Pakistani people especially the youth are getting more involved in online environment and they feel free to share their feelings and opinions which otherwise they can't. There exists a fear of Isolation which restricts people from sharing their actual feelings about someone or some incident openly in presence of others. But such freedom can also intervene in someone else privacy and hence is not tolerated.

Young boys and girls particularly are very carefree and often like exciting things. They often accept friend requests from random people and start talking to them as they are very curious most of the time. They often remain unaware of the evil plans of the other person. They disclose their personal information in front of them, who later black mail them, stalk them or harass them by sending them unethical messages have sexual content in them.

According to the research study conducted by Ybarra and Mitchell (2008) youth are most likely to be the victims of online harassment and abuses and they often tend to hide it instead of sharing it with their family and friends. They shared that youth between the ages 10-15 was prone to such crimes as they are easily caught and black mailed. Younger generation is more active on social media and use it spontaneously. They use it to stay in touch with their friends and remain updated about what's happening around them. Bad experiences or molestation that they face leaves a darker impression on their minds and is reflected upon their behavior (Ybarra, 2004).

Women have been an object of violence worldwide and are often discriminated and treated badly by their male counterparts. Their roles have been marginalized and deteriorated. They often get lesser opportunities to prove themselves and often get lesser appreciation and wages as compared to men. They suffer physical abuse and torture at the hand of men and are forced to live in a certain way and perform a certain predefined roles and duties. Such violence has damaged their status and performance (Freund, 2006).

Murdoch (1995) explained that women of all ages are seriously affected by physical and sexual abuse but that effect often goes unnoticed. They are expected to behave normally with everyone as if nothing ever has happened. The aim of this research study is to analyze the physical and sexual torture given to people in US army and the negative health effects that it inculcates on women. Survey was conducted. 191 women-oriented hospitals were selected between the time duration 1992-1993. Samples of 411 women were randomly selected among them. The findings suggest that most of the women have suffered sexual assault and molestation in the past.

Till (1980) in his research study explained that students are often the victims of molestation and sexual assault. Such incidents often go unreported due to the cultural norms or fear of the culprit in such cases. Different types of harassments were identified. Mostly students are harassed and blackmailed by someone they already know; they are easy targets for them.

### **Problem Statement**

Extensive use of Facebook by female university students and lack of privacy settings often create a lot of disturbance in their lives. Female university students are often easy targets and are misused easily. They are often victims of “Sexting” which is messages that have sex talk in it and “harassment”. They are often black mailed and psychologically tortured and these criminal minded people who are behind these hideous acts often escape easily. Many females have committed suicide due to this. Extensive freedom on Facebook leads higher rate of insecurity for its users.

### **Significance of the Study**

Sexting is a new but alarming concept and people have openly started to talk about it. This research study proves significant in understanding the harmful effects using one’s freedom to the extent that it intervenes with another person’s personal space. The major significance of the study is that it would spread awareness in the society regarding the harassment observed on Facebook, might make parents more careful and keen and they might start discussion with their daughters openly and give them confidence. This study might also motivate the females to show courage and speak out and report any such activity rather than getting black mailed. This will surely add to the existing body of knowledge and help in deriving attention towards this issue and then steps might be taken to increase security for the Facebook users.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To check the level of insecurity in female university students after Facebook usage
- To evaluate the consequences of freedom in usage of Facebook in female university students
- To analyze the role of Facebook in harassment of female university students

### **Review of Literature**

Loy and Stewart (1984) tend to explain how sexual harassment effected the working environment for women and cause hurdles in their day to day work. They do suffer discrimination in wages and also the provision of fringe benefits and often are teased by

their male coworkers which make the environment unfavorable for them. In depth Interviews were conducted from females and their experiences were noted. In a male dominating society the major power lies in the hands of men who then control everything else including women, who are considered to be a weaker gender as well.

Much awareness has already been given regarding sexual harassment to people and they have been encouraged to retaliate when they suffer anything like that. This research attempts at analyzing how the people especially women respond to such an act and what strategy they follow to avoid it and deal with it. It also explains how such an incident effect the lives of women and re shape their behavior and reduces their confidence level. It tends to formulate a theory on sexual harassment as well and make women aware of the legal actions that they can take in this regard (Fitzgerald, Swan & Fischer, 1995).

This research study tends to analyze the claim skeptically that is made by the dealers and business men who deal in the sex industry, that such human trade that includes the import and export of women and children should be made legal as it's just another way to give pleasure to men. Women and children are treated as articles of trade which could be bought and sold at will of their masters. Although United Nations and human rights community has expressed their anger on this and have passed some resolutions as well, but implementation is poor therefore such business tend to flourish. Child pornography and abuse is an increasing phenomenon and needs to be tacked with firm dedication (Jeffreys, 2010).

Freund (2006) explains that women have been victimized ever since they have existed. Considering them to be a weaker gender tend to further marginalize their role and status in the society. They have suffered violence, abuse and discrimination and have often responded with silence and affection. Their silence has actually delivered an image of them as weak and dependent. The fear of violence has over shadowed many of their capabilities and stereotyped certain pre-defined roles with them. Women should be provided with security and safety so that they can flourish and grow in a healthy environment.

This research study focuses on the increasing power and independence of men that they do everything that they think is right rather than understanding and considering the affects it is inflicting upon society. Women are suffering due to this as their privacy and freedom gets hindered by this (Johns, Trott & Wright, 2019).

Harassment has become quite common in real life but on social media the extent and danger is alarming as it's a virtual space where people come and interact and often they hide their real identity. It's extremely difficult to examine any situation and to claim as to who is the real culprit. The idea of fake identities prevail here. Different policies have

been designed in order to counter this issue and the study under consideration was conducted to analyze the different policies. Content analysis of different policies was conducted in order to understand them thoroughly (Pater, Kim, Mynatt & Fiesler, 2016).

Teenagers are often easy targets of harassment and sexual violence. This is growing day by day due to the increase in freedom given on social media and lack of security and check and balance on the teenager's use of social media. This research study aims at understanding that how the extensive use of internet and social media groups increases the chance of sexting and harassment online in United States of America. Survey method was used. Certain features in the personality of teenagers were identified that make them more prone to such incidents. Often teenagers who lack confident, have poor relation with their parents fall in the vicious cycle of these criminal (Sengupta & Chaudhuri, 2008).

Kennedy III et al (2017) tried to analyze probable solutions to the problem of online harassment by providing ease to the victims from regulating a system of instant reporting of such events automatically through system. Content analysis was conducted.

Lindsay and Krysik (2012) conducted this research study in which they analyzed the level of harassment faced by college students online. They identified a correlation between the amount of time spend on online media and the chances of harassment faced by the users. The percentage is a bit higher in college students. The study was conducted in Turkey.

This research study tend to identify and understand the situations, very few but still prominent in which harassment can be regarded as justified. Experimental research was conducted and it was identified that the types of harassment might vary from place to place. There are strict rules and regulations for harassments where criminals are punished while on the other hand in online harassment it's often difficult to understand and come to a conclusion (Blackwell, Chen, Schoenebeck & Lampe, 2018).

With the advancement in technology and internet, this world has become a global village. Cyber space provides an open field for people to share and express their opinions and feelings without fear. Strangers turn out to be friends and it often change into relationships. But there remains no credibility hence crimes are generated. Blind trusts on people one don't know often create a lot of disturbance. Now there are ways through which internet harassment can be monitored and check and balance could be maintained. This was extremely necessary to prevent such issues from occurring (Yin, Xue, Hong, Davison, Kontostathis & Edward, 2009).

The research study conducted by Ybarra and Mitchell (2008) attempts to explain that youth are the easy targets of harassment and sexual abuse especially when it's done

online on social networking sites like Facebook and most of the cases often go unreported and people tend to hide them in order to protect themselves from defamation. Survey method was employed. Sample consisted of participants between the age of 10-15 years who have used internet at least once in half year. The findings suggest that there is an increase in the forced friendships, use of sexual words and comments on Facebook. People are trying to molest the young people and take advantage of them.

Majority of youth both males and females are connected with each other through social interacting websites. They use internet for some reason or the other. Similarly they often have to face the circumstances of extensive freedom of speech in the form of teasing, stalking, sexual molestation and harassment online. Young females and males suffer from disgusting and un pleasant experiences and often that is reflected in their behavior and actions. Often they remain silent and prefer not to disclose it in front of anyone and keep the agony within themselves. This research study attempts at explaining the direct relationship between the behavioral changes that can be observed in young people and online teasing and harassment. Cross sectional analysis was conducted; youth between the ages of 10-17 are selected. The findings suggest that such harassment and insecurity on cyber space is one of the alarming causes of psychological issues like depression and frustration (Ybarra, 2004).

This research study explains the effect of Facebook usage on the behavior of women and the way they feel about their bodies after looking at the pictures of others. A sense of competition develops between them and when they can't match that they feel like a loser and often feel dissatisfied from their bodies. This often inculcates frustration and depression among them. Women are more affected by Facebook than by other sites that shows a fixed data. The diversity of social media is more influential than anything else. Experimental research was conducted, certain experiment tests were done and effect was observed (Fardouly et al., 2015).

Antona, Kevorkian & Russom (2010) conducted a research study in which they analyzed the negative consequences of giving internet access to young kids without parental monitoring and control. Findings suggest that the influence is devastating especially in younger kids whose minds are considered to be fragile and like a clean slate and they can be manipulated easily. Cyber bullying is an alarming issue raised these days and younger generation is more vulnerable to this issue.

The impact of social media on children is immense as children are innocent and vulnerable and can easily be targeted and manipulated. With excessive use and lack of monitoring social media content which is not prohibited by age or has violent or vulgar content disturbs the mind set of children and often encourage them to commit crime (O'Keeffe & Pearson, 2011).

According to this research study Huesmann (2007) exposure to violent content on television and movies often prove to have detrimental effects on the minds of people and make them believe that this world is a dangerous place to live. Media is showing violent content on television and depicting the reality in a violent and unreal way. People learn from their environment and Media plays an important role in shaping the way we view our environment. Women feel that this world is a dangerous place to live and they start to fear out.

Over the past few decades there has been a prominent revolution in the field of technology and once considered a want has now become a necessity and therefore has become an indispensable part of our life style. The new generation considers internet and mobiles the most important possession they own. It has benefits but it does have drawbacks as well that need to be monitored. Laws should be passed (William & Bill, 2011).

The currently emerging issue of sexting, sending nude images through cell phone texting, presents ever more challenging concerns for the parents and also the institutions as gate keeping is extremely on social media. Mobile phones and internet has become a common commodity and level of monitoring has declined (Willard, 2011).

Ojeda, Ray & Hunter (2019) analyzed the term Sexting, it can be divided into two mainly Sex and texting, it could be further describe as text message sent through phone which have sexual content. As mobile phone has become a basic commodity and regarded more as a necessity now, all social media applications can be downloaded and used on it therefore the amount of time youth particularly spend on Mobile has increased, with that has increased sexting and sharing of inappropriate content and then later people often girls get blackmailed over it.

Shariff (2015) has written the book on sexting and cyber bullying and has deeply analyzed the consequences of each, has also highlighted a few major incidents and later provided probable solution to the issue.

Enarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper (2010) wrote and edited a book in which they explained their investigation regarding the types of harassments faced by people working in esteemed organization and the policies regarding it that are implemented to secure people from such heinous activities.

Often the young an innocent people are blamed if they report any such incident in which they might have suffered harassment or abuse. With the increase in the usage of internet and social networking sites, there has been an increase in the incidents of harassment and of use of sexual content in verbal conversation and texting on Facebook. Often wrong,

unethical messages are being sending to girls, often their accounts are hacked. Using sexual content or “sexting” is a common practice now and most of the girls are victims of it somehow. Much effort needs to be done in this regard (Hasinoff, 2012).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theoretical framework helps in understanding the topic in detail and explains the background. Two theories are applicable to our research study. Spiral of Silence theory and Feminist media theory are most relevant theories to our topic

According to Neumann (1974) who also was the founder of Spiral of silence theory, people tend to hide their true feelings and opinions when they judge that the environment is hostile towards them and has a different view point. They tend to hide their opinion due to fear of isolation, fear of being left out. Often, they have different view point regarding some issue but they tend to hide it and support the majority, just because they feel afraid to stand alone.

Spiral of Silence theory is quite relevant to our research study because often females suffering harassment and oppression either physically or on internet tends to stay quiet and hide their sufferings because of the fear of losing their pride, dignity and respect in the society. This study is focused on female students of Pakistan and here female are often seen with suspicions and hatred even when they are mere victims of rape and abuse. In a male dominated society where women are considered less fortunate, females tend to remain quiet then to fight back.

Scheufele & Moy (2000) has conducted a research study in which they analyzed all the assumptions and statements given by Neuman the founder of Spiral of silence theory and evaluated their relevance and usage in current scenario.

According to the Pew Research conducted by Hampton, Rainie, Lu, Dwyer and Shin (2014) after the invent of social media people have engaged themselves in virtual communication and have started to ignore the presence of others in real life. On one hand people feel free to share their feelings on social media, there is lesser fear of isolation as compared to reality.

Second theory that seemed very relevant to this research study is the Radical Feminist theory. According Davis (2008) feminist scholars are continuously struggling for gender equality and women rights particularly in a male dominating society. This research study tends to explain the concept of discrimination and subordination that prevails in the society at women’s end. Women tend to lack there basic rights and are often judged. They are also objectified and treated as sexual object to appeal the men and are often exploited on the bases of their sexuality and body appeal.

In the book written by Rowland and Klein (1996) detailed features of Radical feminism has been explained keeping in mind the historical perspective and the ongoing situations and circumstances women are going through.

Feminist theory is relevant to our research study directly as the topic is directly linked to females and their problem. Feminist have been fighting against harassment and sexual abuse since the beginning. This is the foundation objective of the theory. Therefore, it is applicable.

### **Research Questions**

- How Facebook usage increase insecurity among female university students?
- How the freedom on Facebook leads to sexting among female university students?
- Why Facebook is held responsible for the harassment of female university Students?

### **Research Methodology**

Qualitative research methodology was employed. In-depth interviews were conducted from 20 female university students of Lahore, Pakistan. The in-depth interview consisted of a few structured and rest unstructured questions. Researcher firstly developed a rapport with the interviewee and once the trust was developed then asked in detail and personal open-ended questions from them.

**Universe of the Study:** Female University Students

**Population:** Female respondents lie between the age of 17-24 years and were bachelors students of University Central Punjab.

**Sample:** 20 Female University Students

**Sampling Technique:**

Non-Probability, Convenient Sampling

### **Discussion**

All the in-depth interviews that were conducted very well explained the research questions and helped in drawing conclusions. When the researchers started the in-depth interviews the researchers already had a prepared Interview protocol. Researchers told each respondent the time duration of each interview in order to make sure the availability of the interviewee. Each interview took 25-30 minutes, detailed data was gathered. Respondents were informed about the topic and objectives of research. Ethical Consent was taken. Before formally starting the interview, researchers tried to build a rapport with the respondents and made they feel comfortable and open regarding the topic. Later on,

once the interview was over the researchers noted the confusions that occurred during the interviews. Two common issues that the researchers faced were that most of the female respondents had no idea about the term “Sexting” and were a bit reluctant at first to admit that they have ever suffered harassment.

### **Q1. How Facebook usage increase insecurity among female University students?**

After an overall analysis of the results it could be concluded that most of the girls feel unsafe and insecure on Facebook, this is one reason why they use fake ids and hide their identities. Often, they lack permission from families or are lacking confidence due to low social status. Most of them said that they are very particular in checking their privacy on Facebook. They are careful in keeping their password secret and not sharing with anyone. Mostly girls seemed reluctant in sharing it with their families and parents. Females tend to stay quite against all the in justice without saying a word just to avoid humiliation and shame. Female share their personal information and pictures and get involved in sexting and then get blackmailed and harassed by men and end up giving their lives or moving in depression.

### **Q2. How the freedom on Facebook leads to sexting among female university students?**

Most of the female respondents were of a view that it is always a two way process. Girls initially get involved in boys, start sharing their private things and pictures and often start unethical conversation using “Sexual content”, and later get blackmailed by them and are often tortured. Most of them said that they have received such messages which they often have ignored. The youth is becoming quite frustrated as they are not allowed to do all this openly as its UN lawful but on Facebook they have complete freedom of expression. They can fulfill their sexual desires and wants openly without fear. Lack of proper guidance and females away from families living in hostels push females towards searching love and support in friends and most often Virtual friends, whom they might never have met in person and they start trusting them completely and then often falling unconsciously in a vicious trap.

### **Q3. Why Facebook is held responsible for the harassment of female university students?**

Most of our respondents agreed to this point that Facebook is responsible for harassment among female university students and they are often trapped and abused because of this. The social interaction and social contact leads to friendships between people who are often strangers. Females are easily manipulated and then harassed. Respondents were strongly agreeing on this that female are partially responsible for the harassment they suffer. They provide them a chance. Facebook provide a virtual platform to youth particularly to interact with opposite gender. Keeping in mind the cultural scenario and religious restriction faced by youth and especially female youth in Pakistan its quite

evident that there are a lot of curiosities in female youth and when approached by men who praise them, they tend to immediately fall in love with them without knowing their reality. Often they are fake and later they exploit the females.

## Conclusions

This is very much important to know about the effects of social media especially the impacts of Facebook. Female university students use this social platform to express themselves. They share their pictures, videos, and other content to show what they are and what they like. They spend a lot of time in using Facebook. There is a competition among them to share and show that what is happening in their lives. They private conversation and chat with males especially brings many problems for them. Initially, it is a fun for them, sharing their personal experiences, family information, telling them what is happening overall in their lives. In Pakistani society people do not expect from our females to be detract or fall in wrong activities. Many respondents share the real and true Facebook stories of their friends who became victim of it. They share sexual content with friends on Facebook discuss it and even some females send their unethical pictures to male friends. Later they were black mailed by the same friends. Sexting and harassment among female students are increasing day by day. Parents do not know what their children are doing in the virtual world of social media. They are facing the serious consequences of sexting. The frankness, sharing of indecent content and private chat make them embarrass. They do not share their problems with their family members. One respondent told that her friend committed suicide as she was being blackmailed by her ex-Facebook friend. The findings of this study suggest that parents, siblings and government have to play their significant role in order to avoid bad consequences of sexting in this society.

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