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# *Men will be Men?*: Masculinities on display in the Facebook communication practices of Pakistani men

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**ABSTRACT**

In the past decade, the popularization of social media in Pakistan has greatly influenced the way in which people communicate and interact with each other. The rapidly evolving nature of online social media communication in the country when viewed against the backdrop of the country's socio-cultural characteristics and religion is particularly significant. Facebook, being the prime social media platform in Pakistan has been revolutionary and liberating because while acting as a medium of communication, which transgresses the traditional manner of gendered social interactions, it has at the same time enabled the users to perpetuate and reinforce the existing gender ideology. As a result, Facebook in Pakistan has evolved into a space where individuals construct gender identities discursively. Using Multimodal Discourse Analysis, I investigate the ways in which Pakistani men multimodally construct their gender identities on Facebook. I show how Pakistani men are not only upholding the existing socio-cultural norms and discourse but also there are subtle signs of digression from the established models of masculinity.

## Introduction

In Pakistan's patriarchal system, gender is commonly viewed in a stereotypical, binary way. In this system, the public domain is predominantly within the purview of men while women are positioned in the private domain of home and family. Men are traditionally seen as the guardians of women and women as 'vulnerable targets' who need male protection (Jafar, 2005). This rigid gender ideology thus bestows on men a power that is not enjoyed by most women in the Pakistani culture. While Pakistani womanhood cannot be reduced to a homogenized singularity of disempowerment and victimization, it is nevertheless true that their conduct and mobility in comparison to that of men is monitored and policed by established socio-cultural norms. Societal pressures compel men to act according to stereotypical gender models of masculinity. For example, they are expected to be rational, brave, aggressive and emotionless beings (ibid). These gendered norms expose the double standards of a patriarchal culture. In

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sexual behavior, especially, men are positioned as active, and even aggressive, partners, and women as passive receptacles of their desire (Khan, 2018). Similarly, male promiscuity is often overlooked and ignored by society, communities and families alike, while the same behavior in women in often severely punished. In fact, as Gelfand, LaFree, Fahey, and Feinberg (2013) argue, Pakistan is among the countries that have the strongest patriarchal traditions and lowest tolerance of deviant behavior.

With reference to people using available digital artefacts to construct and perform gender identities (boyd, 2007), scholars have argued that in the cyber-social sphere, gender can be (re)negotiated with respect to socio-cultural norms and their physical realities (Danet, 1998). In this context, what I mean by gender identities is that I am interested in exploring how gender is being negotiated in connection to other aspects of identity, such as religion, social class, education, culture, and socio-political history of Pakistan. However, the idea that Facebook, or social media in general, allows individuals to enact identities in more 'fluid and non-traditional' ways has been contested in contemporary empirical studies on online discourse (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018; Mullany, 2004). These studies, some of which explore heteronormative beauty standards and misogynistic discourse in online environments, generate a suspicion that social media allows its users to 'do' gender by replicating the prevalent gender ideology. This, in turn, makes gender, in today's era a carefully orchestrated performance in both the physical and the online world. Furthermore, as far as men, the focus in the article, are concerned, it could be argued that both on-and offline they socially perform masculinity in ways that are semiotically 'linked to men, and not to women, through cultural discourses and models' (Kiesling, 2007, p. 659). In principle, while this may mean orienting to the normative gender dichotomy, it does not attribute any specific traits to masculinity, thus allowing men the possibility to embrace other masculinities simultaneously (ibid). It can be argued here that although gender, discourse and cultural practices of people in an online environment have been rigorously investigated globally, in Pakistan, where Facebook is the primary social media site for particularly men (77% of Facebook users are men ($n = 35$ million)) (Alphapro, 2018), there is very little research on the social and cultural discourse practices on how young Pakistani men engage in online social networking. To bridge this gap in research, in this article, I aim to focus on Pakistani men especially and investigate how they construct their gender identities on Facebook. More specifically, by using Multimodal Discourse Analysis, I investigate the following questions:

(a) How do Pakistani men construct their identities in their Facebook posts? To answer this question, I will pay attention to how they mobilize both visual and linguistic resources, and to how these resources are interconnected in the communication of specific meanings.

(b) Do the gendered performances of Pakistani male Facebook users mirror traditional heteropatriarchal models of masculinity prevalent in Pakistan, or is there evidence of moving away from, or challenging traditional masculinity?

I am particularly interested in examining whether, for Pakistani men, Facebook functions as an extension of the social reality of Pakistani society or whether it has

developed into a potentially subversive space where men feel free to explore and experiment with their identities.

## Masculinity in social media

Globally, in psychological, sociological and cultural studies, masculinity on social media has been widely investigated (see e.g. Genter, 2014; Patterson, 2013; Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016). These studies have often focused on such themes as violence, male self-presentation strategies, sexual display, sexual risk behavior and portrayals of manhood. In South Asia, most of the research on social media and gender has focused on political activism, cultural identity and narratives of dissent in young adults. For example, Balaji (2014), in his study on Indian masculinity, argued that social media artefacts play a pivotal role in successfully commodifying men into a hyper-sexualized, heteronormative and homogenized ideal of Indian masculinity, thereby removing all sorts of cultural and regional differences. However, in Pakistan, previous studies on gender have mainly focused on Pakistani women's behavioral patterns, attitudes and language in the educational, print media and television settings (e.g. Pillay, 2008; Raza & Liaqat, 2016). The few studies on masculinity in the Pakistani context have examined these in the specific contexts of religion, terrorism, migration, medicine and transnational marriages (e.g. Aslam, 2014; De Sondy, 2009; Khan, 2018). In the Pakistani social media context, two notable exceptions are Karamat and Farooq (2016) and Talib (2010). Karamat and Farooq (2016) investigated political activism on Facebook and Twitter and found that these social media platforms not only influence political activism but also play a crucial role in initiating political change in the country. Talib (2010), in turn, argued that social media, cell phones and blogs played a huge part in mobilizing students to participate in protests and in disseminating a counter narrative to the government's move to impose a state of emergency in Pakistan in 2007. However, given the rapidly evolving nature of social media and its increasing presence in the everyday lives of Pakistani youth, there is a need to delve deeper into the role of masculinity in social media, and, in particular, to look at how masculinity is constructed not only verbally, but also, increasingly via intersemiotic means.

## Methodology

### Data collection

The data for this study comprise of 300 screenshots of posts by ten Pakistani Muslim male Facebook users from South Punjab. These posts, consisting of both verbal and non-verbal content (text and visuals), which the participants shared on their timeline, were collected systematically during a three-month period of May to July 2017. The visual aspects of the posts mainly consisted of photographs, animated characters and cartoon strips while the textual elements were either inscribed on the images or presented as a comment by the participants. The participants allowed me access to their Facebook pages without any obstruction, on the condition that I would not analyse the comments on their posted content. Their (gendered) justification for this stipulation was that it was 'culturally' or 'morally' inappropriate for me, as a Pakistani-Muslim woman, to read

comments that could potentially include abusive content. Another justification offered by them was the apprehension that my analysis of the comments might end up unsettling their offline relationships, and/or portray the participants in a negative light.

## Sampling and ethical Considerations

I collected the data from participants by using snowball sampling. I started by contacting people in my friend-list. I explained to them the nature and purpose of my study, asking if they would be interested to be a part of this project. They were also requested to share this information with their friends and family members. This technique enabled me to include otherwise unreachable participants (Groenewald, 2004). After a few days, I was contacted by potential participants who showed interest in this project. My rationale for collecting data from ten participants is that, soon after starting the process, I observed that the same themes constantly recurred, rendering additional data collection redundant. The consistency in the repetition of the themes allowed me to build the analysis on a solid and cohesive foundation.

To ensure the privacy and safety of the participants, they were thoroughly briefed about the nature, aims and objectives of the research at the very start of the project. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the project at any time. They were assured that their posts would be analyzed, stored and published in a fully confidential manner, that is, their personal information or real names would not be disclosed. They were also informed that the posts most relevant to the research questions would be collected and used.

## Why South Punjab Facebook users?

The age, educational background and socio-economic status of the participants were pivotal points of consideration during the selection process. I selected participants between the ages of 18 and 30 because it has been argued that these are the key years during which individuals 'acquire autonomy and build a sense of self' (Benson & Elder, 2011, p. 2) during this age-group. The elite (the extremely rich and affluent) and the economically underprivileged were excluded from the study because the latter did not use Facebook, whereas the cosmopolitan lifestyle of the former excludes this class from a representative status. I selected my participants from the middle and upper-middle classes because they have most commonly been considered the custodians of moral, cultural and societal traditions (Jamal, 2013, p. 297). According to Maqsood (2017), these classes signify the 'orthodox world of fundamentalist Islam as it reaches out for the fruits of modernity while holding on to the certitudes of traditional structure' (p. 205). Interestingly, however, the same classes are also undergoing ideological turmoil. Economic prosperity in a rapidly evolving digital age has resulted in creating a struggle between modern and traditional impulses and gender identities (ibid).

Additionally, I chose to select participants from South Punjab for two reasons. In comparison to other metropolitan areas of Pakistan, South Punjab is both educationally backward and culturally conservative. It is also known for its feudal system whereby the power, position and authority of feudal landlords is supported by the political administration (Javaid & Aslam, 2017). However, in the wake of the 2018 national elections social

media played a key role in moderating the fears of the marginalized people of South Punjab by providing them with a means to challenge their powerful feudal lords. It could also be argued that these events are an indication of a change from an agrarian to a more business-centered economy. Overall, selecting participants based on their geographical location, South Punjab, age and social class makes it possible to study gendered identities in a digital context, in an era of rapidly evolving modernity.

## Analytic framework

This study employed Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA), (Jones, 2015; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006) as its theoretical framework. MMDA was chosen for three reasons. First, it enables the investigation of communication processes as an interplay of multiple semiotic resources including still and moving visuals, color, gestures, gaze, posture, typography and layout. It also allows me to examine the potential of semiotic resources to express new meanings and construe discourse (ibid). Second, MMDA assumes that, like language, these modes are culturally bound, as they have been socially and historically shaped to accomplish specific societal functions. Third, semiotic resources play a crucial role in the critical thinking processes of individuals: they are deployed to achieve specific goals and are thus used to uphold specific ideologies (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 6–14).

In my analysis of the linguistic and visual aspects of the posts, I have drawn on the notions of social distance, attitude, salience and information value (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). A focus on these features helps reveal (a) how the posters attract and direct the attention of their audience, (b) how they negotiate their relationship with the latter, and (c) how the information in their posts is packaged and presented. My motivation for paying attention to these aspects of the posts was that it enables me to identify and describe, firstly, what kinds of posts Pakistani men choose to share on their Facebook profiles, and, secondly, what these selected posts and their particular features convey of how they want to construct their masculinity. Particular attention was paid to the posters' language choices and contents of their messages, image captions and the fragments of text embedded in images. In my analysis, the specific aim was to provide an empirical basis for investigating both how textual content and images 'look' and what they can (potentially) 'do', i.e. their function (Pinney, 2008; as cited in Rose, 2012, p. 8). In this respect, this study differs from most of the previous studies that have mainly investigated social media posts with quantitative methods (see e.g. Yazdani & Manovich, 2015).

In the analysis of visuals, paying attention to social distance means assessing the physical proximity of the people, places and things depicted in images. It can be conveyed through the choice of frame size, such as close-up, medium or long shot. For example, a close-up indicates intimacy between the viewer and the subject, a medium shot indicates the social distance between acquaintances, and a long shot illustrates the social distance between strangers. In the verbal parts of the posts, social distance is typically realized through the formality of 'style'. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) identify three forms of style: the 'personal style', which refers to the intimate use of language indicating solidarity with individuals and groups; the 'social style', which is used in everyday interactions with colleagues and acquaintances;

and the 'public style', which is reserved for formal occasions. Here, the notion of atti-
tude refers to the choice of camera angles; these reflect the interaction and power
dynamics between the subject and the viewer.

As far as the analysis of attitudes is concerned, my visual analysis paid attention to
the angles of the representation. The frontal angle indicates involvement whereas an
oblique angle suggests detachment between the viewer and the subject. Similarly, the
high angle shot, depicts the power of the viewer over the represented participant
whereas the eye-level shot indicates an equal distribution of power and the low
angle shot the power of the represented participant over the viewer. Linguistically, atti-
tude is articulated through three characteristics: affect, judgment and appreciation
(Macken-Horarik, 2004). The notion of affect refers to the emotive quality of the
text, that is, whether the verbal text evokes an emotional response or desire in the
reader. Judgement refers to the ethical evaluation of a behavior, and appreciation
signifies the aesthetic dimensions of experience. Salience was investigated by examin-
ing how elements such as foregrounding, backgrounding, emphasis, contrast and color
are used to attract and guide the viewer's attention. For example, in an all-text post,
the choice of color, font and how the text is inscribed (i.e. whether it's written in
bold, italics, capital or small letters) may foreground specific pieces of information
as salient in the post, thereby immediately directing the attention of the audience to
the message. Thus, the salient lexemes allow the viewers to notice the most significant
aspects of the message at first glance.

Lastly, attention was given to the compositional criteria of information value in order
to analyse how the information was being displayed in the post, that is, how the text and
the image is distributed or positioned. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) describe three
ways to present this information (pp. 194–200). These are, from top to bottom, left to
right and center-margin. In the top to bottom orientation, the top represents the
'ideal' whereas the 'real' appears at the bottom. In such a layout, the ideal always plays
the leading role, the real remaining subservient. In the left to right orientation, the infor-
mation on the left is 'familiar and known' while that on the right is 'new'. In center-
margin design, the center embodies the 'nucleus of information' whereas the information
in the margins is considered 'subservient' or 'contextualizing information'. However, as
Urdu is written from right to left, the familiar and known' information is shown on the
right and the 'new' on the left'.

This study also benefited from the notion of intersemiotic parallelism, introduced by
Liu and O'Halloran (2009) as part of their intersemiotic cohesive devices framework and
which they employed in studying image-text logical relations. Intersemiotic parallelism
'occurs when similar organizations of information are offered across distinct modes'
(Bateman, 2014, p. 172). Moreover, the similarity of the information across various
modes generates co-contextualizations in which each verbal and visual content creates
a context of interpretation for the other contents, thereby generating shared points of
contact, which support meaning extension (ibid). In my data, an emphasis on interse-
miotic parallelism means that the visual features become representative and/or an exten-
sion of what is being communicated linguistically and vice versa.

## Data analysis

The data was arranged into four groups (see Table 1) based on the topics/themes in posts. It is significant to note here that these groups are not mutually exclusive but often overlap.

These posts are discussed here in two sections, according to what kind of an image of masculinity they convey. The first section consists of posts, which orient to traditional heteropatriarchal masculinity. The second, smaller, group includes posts, which highlight emergent forms of masculinity. It is significant to mention here that the examples discussed in the analysis section below were chosen based on (a) such posts were repetitively posted by the participants, (b) the posts are representative of the most typical trends and patterns found in the data and (c) these posts show significant similarity in the use of verbal and visual features with those that constituted those categories.

### (1) posts highlighting traditional heteropatriarchal masculinity

*Travel diaries* are the most common type (38%) of the posts. Their photography mostly documented the posters' adventurous road trips and positioned them in exotic Northern Pakistani regions featuring landscapes, rare wildlife, and captured people in their cultural activities. In terms of the content of these posts, the posters mostly provided the factual information with whom, when and where they had traveled. As a typical example of these posts, Example 1 depicts a photo taken by the poster's friend during their trip to the Northern areas of Pakistan.



Example 1

Example 1 includes an aesthetized picture of a man visiting an exotic place. It shows the poster's friend on a top of a mountain holding a camera in his hands and taking photographs of the place. The background of the picture shows the snow-covered mountain tops; and the human figure is positioned in the foreground. The image is in black and

**Table 1.** Types of posts according to their topic and their relative frequency.

| Posts by Topic | Frequency ($n = 300$) |
| --- | --- |
| Posts about Travel | 38% |
| Posts about Politics | 23% |
| Posts about Women | 22% |
| Posts about Relationships | 17% |

white – a hallmark of landscape photography (Peterson & Schellenberg, 2017). Black and white color tones are utilized here for multiple reasons. For example, they can redirect the attention of the viewers on the represented participant by creating a sense of mystery and drama to the environment. Moreover, they can implicitly refer to journalistic uses of pictures: in them, monochrome is often employed as a strategic device in reportage or life photography to create a story telling effect (ibid). The use of the long shot in the post generates the feeling of remoteness between the represented participant and the viewer (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Moreover, an oblique camera angle is employed in which the subject of the picture and the viewers do not share the same eye line that allows the viewer to look at the photograph from an outsider's perspective and which suggests that the viewer is not engaged in the same world as which is depicted in the visual. Thus, put together, these features combine in making the photograph as a kind of an 'exhibit' for the audience. The only piece of verbal text that accompanies the image is the caption 'P.C Ahmad' (P.C stands for Photo Credits) that provides the audience with factual information of who (Ahmad) took the photograph. In this particular example, the text-image relationship is also indicated through 'Ahmad'.

Globally, the practice of posting travel photography on social media is common among men. This practice is also followed by Pakistani male Facebook users. These posts may suggest that men are engaged in authoring their identities in the form of pictorial digital narratives by posting their travel experiences on Facebook. Through these photographs, they demonstrate the courageous and risk-taking facet of their identities. This also reflects the fact that, in the Pakistani context, traveling is a highly gendered phenomenon. This gendering shows at two levels. Firstly, travel involves movement in public space, which, in Pakistan, is predominantly a male territory. Secondly, as public space is not for women, traveling is marked by a lack of female presence. This reinforces the notion that women in Pakistan belong to the protected environment of home, while men are given permission to transverse through the geographical and spatial boundaries (Jafar, 2005). Secondly, when men post pictures that locate them in rugged landscapes or places that are less traveled, it fortifies the age-old role of 'man as the hunter and man as the discoverer' that is constructed around qualities such as strength, courage and bravery. As characteristics these are associated with hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This gendering of travel practices thus provides men with an ideal context to engage in activities that '(re)construct their personas as "heroes" by displaying courage, excitement, thrill and risk-taking behaviour' (Lupton & Tullouch, 2002 as cited in Lozanski, 2015, p. 32). The risk-taking factor thus provides a basis where the discourses of masculinity and travel are intertwined (ibid). In short, it could be argued that travel diaries by Pakistani men on Facebook allow them to construct themselves in terms of hegemonic masculinity i.e. men need to position themselves in relation to the kind of masculinity that characterizes the most powerful strata of men even within the male community.

Another popular type (23%) of post for Pakistani men are posts related to both *national and international politics*, and posts that show their *alignment with different political parties in Pakistan*. More specifically, the posts feature pictures of local and international politicians, usually accompanied by textual comments that typically discussed political scenarios in a serious, aggressive or humorous manner. Example 2 is a typical illustration of these posts:

Example 2

> **Translation of the Urdu text in the caption**: 'Do you think it's your father's money that we will forget about it? The only reason behind today's verdict was this man's strong instincts and continuous struggle. 'Mian sb [form of address], you will get tired, but a Captain never gets tired'

> **Translation of Urdu text inscribed on the image**: 'I will make them cry'

Example 2 refers to the political situation of Pakistan in April 2016 when the ex-Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Shareef had been disqualified and removed from his office by the Supreme Court of Pakistan, on the basis of corruption charges related to the Panama Papers leak. Example 2 does this with the help of a photograph of the then opposition leader (and the subsequent Prime Minister) Imran Khan who was actively involved in pursuing the Panama Papers leak case. The photograph is taken in one of his rallies where he is addressing an audience. This is indicated by how he is shown holding a microphone in his hands. In the background of the picture, we see the white and green colors of the Pakistani flag. The picture is a close-up shot from the frontal camera angle of Khan, allowing the audience to not only focus on the minute details of the subject but also to remain in-tune and connected with represented participant's psychological state (Moura, 2014). Moreover, by making the viewers experience and relate to the scene as if they are a part of it (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006), this kind of angle of interaction permits the viewer to feel equally empowered as the subject depicted in the photograph. In addition, the top–bottom configuration is crucial for interpreting the overall meaning of the image. The photograph of Imran Khan is positioned at the top of the post, presenting him as the 'ideal' person who can be the savior of the Pakistani nation. The text inscribed on the post is placed at the bottom and in the middle of the image. Its position suggests that the message is the essential piece of information in the post, as it tells the viewers what Imran Khan intends to do with the corrupt politicians, thereby narrating the 'reality'. The intersemiotic relationship is indicated via the direct quotations of Imran Khan, which is not only inscribed in the image but is also in the caption. For example, the inscribed text, 'MEIN INKO RULAON

GA' ('I will make them cry'), is a direct quotation from Imran Khan which he uttered during one of his rallies. In the caption, the poster made use of other quotations from Khan: 'Tumharay Baap ka paisa hai jo bhool jayen gy? … Mian sb, aap thak jao gy kaptaan thakta nahin hai' ('Do you think it's your father's money that we will forget about it … Mian sb (form of address), you will get tired but a Captain never gets tired'). These quotations vividly tie the image and the text together. Similarly, the use of the words 'this man's …' in the caption also directly refers to Imran Khan.

Thus, here the text-image relationship is that of an extension as the image and text both add meaning to the post. The textual message in this example is written in both Urdu and English. As mentioned above, the Urdu portion of the text in the caption and the message inscribed on the visual are direct quotations from Imran Khan. Urdu is used here to show the poster's emotional response towards the political situation in Pakistan, whereas English is used to (i) provide the factual information that it was Khan who petitioned in the Supreme Court which resulted in Sharif's disqualification. The positioning of the English sentence between the two aggressive direct quotations in Urdu also functions (ii) to soften the hostile tone of the entire message (Malik, 1994). Moreover, English is used by the poster (iii) as a means for expressing his own opinion ('The only reason behind today's verdict was this man's strong instincts and continuous struggle'). Further, the direct quotation in the post add (iv) dramatic value to the post by highlighting Khan's ideological views, thus making the image more relatable for the poster's young, urban, relatively conservative, and middle-class audience who also played a critical role in Khan's victory in 2018 general elections. It also shows the poster's psychological state: by detaching the reporter from the reporting speaker (Bareket-Bojmel, Moran, & Shahar, 2016) and the hostility, authoritativeness and aggressiveness of the Urdu part of the message. The use of the word 'kaptaan (captain)' in caption, by both the poster and Khan indicates the latter's background as Pakistan cricket team's captain. When Khan is cited saying that 'aap thak jao gy kaptaan thakta nahin hai' ('you, (Nawaz Shareef) will get tired but a Captain never gets tired') this allows both the poster and Khan, to associate the qualities of power, dominance, persistence and leadership with Khan.

Interestingly, the poster's choice of sharing this particular quotation of Khan's speech also reinforces and strengthens the masculine persona of Imran Khan. The message inscribed in the image states 'Mein inko rualon ga' (I will make them cry). Written in the active voice and by emphasizing the pronoun 'I', the text directs the reader's attention to the importance of Khan. In sum, these words, in association with the image 'Main inko rulaon ga', ('I will make them cry') are significant, as crying is usually taken as a sign of weakness and is most typically associated with female behavior. Therefore, by making use of words like crying, not only the opposition leader Imran Khan, but also the poster quoting Khan is indirectly feminizing the opponent: Nawaz Shareef, Khan's political opponent, is portrayed as weak and helpless as a woman. Use of such words is a typical feature in constructing a hypermasculine identity as it is achieved through characteristics such as verbal 'toughness' which is viewed as a means of emotional self-control and anger (Zaitchik & Mosher, 1993).

Overall, the verbal text provides a judgement of Supreme Court's order and evokes an emotional response on the part of the poster and his audience. In terms of gender, Banaji & Hardin (1996, as cited in Menegatti & Rubini, 2017, p. 4) argue that 'words consistent

with gender stereotypes have powerful effects also when presented at a subliminal level, whereby they lead participants to classify gender pronouns more quickly into male and female categories. Thus, by employing an aggressive attitude via language helps the poster to portray Khan's hypermasculine persona who is capable of achieving a better social standing and asserting his power as the leader of the pack or the Alpha males. Moreover, this extreme form of masculinity highlighted in this post particularly is presented as the only authentic way for men to express opinion and emotions publicly (Zaitchik & Mosher, 1993).

Pakistani men also *post (22%) about women*. These posts typically highlight their stereotypical negative views about Pakistani women. Often, they do so by including cartoons in their posts, featuring both women and men as their main characters. The content of the posts, in turn, typically focuses on women's behavior and reactions in their everyday interactions, in ways that end up demeaning and disparaging them. Example 3 represents a typical case: it shows a dialogue between two characters, a male rickshaw driver and a young woman. In the cartoon in question, the female character is described as dull, foolish and unsure of what she wants.



Example 3

**Translation of the Urdu text:**

| | |
|---|---|
| Woman: | Auto … (Referring to auto rickshaw) |
| Auto Driver: | Where do you want to go? |
| Female: | Want to go home … |
| Auto Driver: | What is your address? |
| Woman: | Why should I tell you? |

Example 3 tells a multimodal story of a seemingly everyday situation in which a woman takes an auto rickshaw to get to her destination. Visually, the post consists of three pictures. The first section of the cartoon shows the entrance of the rickshaw: it is shown approaching from the left and a female is standing with her slightly raised hand to stop the auto rickshaw. The second picture of the cartoon shows how the driver is asking the woman 'where she wants to go' to which the female replies 'I want to go home'. The last picture is divided into two parts. In the left-hand corner, the rickshaw driver is again asking the woman 'what is your address?' and the female replies 'why

should I tell you?' In the lower right-hand corner, there is an upside-down picture of the auto rickshaw driver, depicting him crying copiously with a bucket full of tears below him. In the background of the picture, on the upper right-hand corner, there is a water-mark of the Facebook meme page from which the poster took the image. The text-image relationship here is what McCloud (1994, p. 152) calls a 'duo-specific', one as both the visual and textual elements essentially contribute to constructing the one and the same meaning.

A close observation of the image and its dialogue shows the sexist ideology of both the cartoonist and the male poster. This shows in several of the cartoonist's choices. Firstly, the driver is constructed in a positive manner. This is achieved through his verbal and embodied language. For example, his Urdu word 'ap ka' (your) in the dialogue 'ap ka ghar kidher hai' (what is your address) indexes politeness, formality and education. Similarly, his posture and his bowed head indicate that he is taking a non-threatening position. Moreover, he is shown to be clean shaved, wearing pants, shirt, and sunglasses – in other words, he is presented as a well-mannered and educated man. In these respects, the woman is his opposite. Instead of giving the address of her home, her turn in the third picture, 'mein kyn batau?' ('Why should I tell you?') is a hostile, silly and irrelevant response to the driver's routine question. Additionally, the woman's facial expressions change from the first picture, where she is shown to be almost smiling and calm, to more aggressive ones in the third picture. In a way, the cartoon depicts something quite real in the social context of Pakistan, where for a woman to travel alone is a serious issue, and where security is their foremost concern. This is because traveling alone can expose them to the danger of being attacked (see e.g. 2012 Delhi, India gang rape case). The consequences of traveling alone for women are real in Pakistan as it may result in their, for example, sexual assault or harassment. However, in this cartoon strip, the woman's concern is mocked. The choice of writing the dialogue in Urdu in the strip apparently suggests that this kind of encounter is normal and takes place on an everyday basis. While it depicts women as irrational and emotional beings, its visual and textual mockery also nullifies and de-signifies social issues such as sexual assaults against women by men. In addition, although the overall tone of the dialogue in Example 3 is not harsh or aggressive, it nevertheless depicts women in dero-gatory terms, reflecting the gender biased norms and sexist attitudes, while (re)construct-ing and representing the gender (Lorber, 1994).

In sum, Example 3 highlights the traditional gender stereotypes in Pakistan according to which men have a higher social and moral status than women do. Such sexist attitudes are prevalent in all walks of life in Pakistan (Shahzad, Shafiq, & Sajid, 2015). Men learn these sexist attitudes via cultural discourse that trains them to perceive women not only worthless but also their subordinate (ibid). It could also be argued that Example 3 illus-trates benevolent sexism prevalent in the Pakistani society. It does this via language that subtly directs prejudice towards women in such a way that it appears to remain 'pure, kind and gentle and in need of men's protection, therefore justifying the male dominance and women's subordinate role (ibid). In patriarchal cultures like Pakistan, men are con-sidered to be the 'rational thinkers' and roles performed by them are highly valued as compared to women; this results in power imbalance in terms of gender and is reflective of the stereotypical notions that are entrenched by the society (Jafar, 2005). Thus, using

benevolent sexism allows men to maintain and exercise their superiority over women and 'treat them in a patronizing manner' (Dardenne, Dumont, & Bollier, 2007).

## (2) posts highlighting emergent model(s) of masculinity

Many posts (17%) dealt in some way with *the posters' relationships*. The visuals in these posts either featured pictures of film stars or singers, whereas the textual elements consisted of quotations on a plain background. These texts typically featured extracts from Urdu fiction professing love, or expressing unrequited love through sharing poetry and lyrics of Pakistani and Bollywood songs. Interestingly however, none of these posts depicted any real-life or fictional female figures. Example 4 constitutes as a typical illustration of such posts:



Example 4

**Translation of the inscription (from Urdu):**

> If I laugh or if I cry I try to find you like a mad person
>
> I don't know if you would love me tomorrow
>
> I don't know if I will have your permission tomorrow
>
> Holding the broken pieces of my heart
>
> I will spend my entire life at your doorstep

**Translation of the Urdu caption:** I would still keep on loving you.

The image used in Example 4 is taken from one of the scenes from the Bollywood film *Half Girlfriend*. The inscription is an extract of lyrics, taken from the movie's romantic track 'Phir bhi tum ko chahun ga' ('I would still keep on loving you') which showcases the love story between the hero and the heroine. Overall, the post conveys a sense of sadness and anguish. The scene in the post portrays the hero of the movie Arjun Kapoor looking at his girlfriend (Shraddha Kapoor) whose presence is shown by including the back of the head and shoulder in the picture, in an over-the-shoulder shot. This kind of a shot is typically used to enable the audience to see that the setting of the scene as

a dialogue between the two represented participants, showing either the loving relation-ship of the subjects or the tension that exists between them (Moura, 2014). A shot like this also allows the viewers to see the facial expressions of the represented participants in order to understand the mood of the conversation, hence creating a sense of intimacy with and experience of the subject's world (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). The picture is edited so that it combines grays and shades of blue. In terms of color psychology, the gray color symbolizes dullness, dirt, and dinginess and it is often associated with sadness and depression, whereas the blue color typically signifies piety and sincerity (Elliot & Maier, 2014). The combination of both these colors, in the visual, generates a sense of detach-ment and dreariness. Thus, the utilization of these colors, along with the grief stricken facial expression of the male subject immediately allows the audience to sense the tension that exists between the two characters. The upper left corner in the image shows the name of the website (lyrics.com) from where the Urdu lyrics have been taken, while the bottom of the visual tells the audience the name of the movie 'half girl-friend'. In the foreground, the lyrics are written in white. The first line of the lyrics 'hasna ho ya rona ho mujhe' ('if I laugh or if I cry') is written in small caps whereas the rest of the lyrics are inscribed in capital letters, indicating emphasis (Willingham, 2018) and making the feelings of the subject visible to the audience.

Interestingly, however, this is the second last line of the lyrics 'Toote dil ke tukde leka' ('holding the broken pieces of my heart') which is not only written in capital letters but which is also highlighted, indicating the part of the message that the poster really wants to convey to the audience, directing their attention to his own heart-broken situation. This meaning is made even more obvious if it is read in association with the caption 'Main phir bhi tmko chahun ga' with a broken heart emoticon ('I would still keep on loving you'). The use of the white color in these lyrics represents sincerity, faith, peace and calm-ness (Elliot & Maier, 2014). In terms of information value, the male character is posi-tioned at the top – thus representing him as the 'ideal' lover who remains invested in love, even if he suffers the loss of his loved one. The textual messages are placed in the center and at the bottom of the image – these convey a sense of the 'actual' situation that is taking place between the two characters. This type of configuration is used here to describe the power dynamics of the two represented participants where the man is por-trayed in an inferior position, compared to the woman (see below). In sum, the text-image relationship in the post is anchored via several features. Firstly, the choice of colors of the visual complement the overall sadness that is expressed through the lyrics. Secondly, the grief-stricken facial expressions of the subject bring together the entire theme. Lastly, in the caption, the poster repeats one of the lines from the lyrics along with a heartbroken emoji (💔). Thus, the visual is extending the meaning of the verbal text.

The poster's decision to express his apparent heartbreak at the hands of his love through song lyrics is significant. This is because poetry, an intimate form of self-expression, allows the writer/reader to address and explore the most sensitive issues of their identity via literary conventions (Raheja & Gold, 1994). In this particular instance, the use of words and phrases like 'pagal' ('mad man'), and 'toote dil ke tukde lekar' ('holding the broken pieces of my heart') casts the man in a positive light: they help to associate the qualities of loyalty, perseverance, love and care with him.

More importantly, the sections 'Main phir bhi tmko chahun ga' ('I would still keep on loving you') and 'Tere darr pe hi reh jaaunga' ('I will spend my entire life at your door-step'), reflect the submission of the male character. As pointed out by Pritchett (2003), in Urdu literary conventions, the power distribution between the lover and beloved is over-whelmingly unequal, as the beloved (female character here) is depicted significantly powerful while the lover (male character in the post) is presented as the one who suffers. The poster, indirectly addressing his beloved here via poetry also thus signifies that the notion of love and it's expressions are deeply rooted in the prevailing culture (Adely, 2016). Therefore, love in South Asian cultures, especially in Pakistan, is perceived as a 'cultural ideal and a hidden practice' (Karandashev, 2017, pp. 167–193). Similar to Tamil culture, previously, even in situations where a man and a woman is married, it was considered disrespectful if the spouses used actual names to refer to each other. Instead the reference was made through a relationship such as 'the father of so and so' (ibid; p.193).

However, from the point of view of traditional gender stereotypes in Pakistan, partici-pant's decision to express his emotions on Facebook shows a subtle detachment from the traditional concept of love and masculinity. Moreover, even when a man expresses such emotions of love, care and affection for his wife, he is criticized for not being a 'real man'. The cultural concept used for such men is the phrase 'Biwi kay neechay laga hua hai' ('to be excessively obedient to your wife'). This demeaning piece of received wisdom mostly comes from the other men who try to uphold the cultural definitions of hegemonic mas-culinity (Rizvi, 2015). These traditional definitions of masculinity in Pakistan portray men as aggressive, emotionless and ambitious human beings who not only exert control over their wives in order to prove their masculinity. At the same time, they also use these patriarchal notions to ridicule other men who do not follow the established cultural notions of masculinity (ibid). In the context of Facebook in Pakistan, however, and as illustrated by Example 4, men seem to be using social media as a tool to show the softer side of their gendered identities. This more emotional and sensitive masculinity emergent on Facebook could be argued to resonate with the idea of multiple masculi-nities, highlighted in recent gender and masculinity studies (see e.g. Lamont, 2015). According to these studies, and increasing number of men have started to distance them-selves from the rigid and narrow ideology of masculinity, aligning with views that see masculinity as plural, hybrid and inclusive' (Eisen, 2019). However, as evinced by Example 4, such softer models of masculinity may also allow Pakistani men to do gender in a way that manages to uphold their supremacy over women, while at the same time permits them to negotiate the 'symbolic boundaries and power relations between types of men' (ibid, p.3). In Example 4, this shows in how the poster aligns with hybrid masculinity using poetry that allows him to express his emotions, without disrupting the traditional concept of masculinity by blurring the symbolic and social boundaries that exist between Pakistani men and women.

## Conclusion

As a member of a culture where men are treated as the norm and their identities taken as the default against which all other identities are measured, I was interested in the con-struction of masculinity in Facebook posts by Pakistani males. The analysis confirms

its complex and multifaceted nature. Men were found predominantly to conform to the existing socio-cultural norms of Pakistani society. They shared images that reflect the mainstream heteropatriarchal notion of masculinity. For Pakistani men, sharing their experiences via photographs (e.g. travel photos) on Facebook appears to be a subtle way of constructing their identities as members of the most powerful stratum of society. Similarly, my data included many posts referring to politics. Men indulge in political debates to show their affiliation to specific people or groups and thereby exercise their power. Their need to maintain control over the opposition is sometimes achieved via 'verbal toughness', which is viewed as the only authentic way to publicly express their opinions and emotions (Zaitchik & Mosher, 1993). Additionally, men also shared posts that targeted women by portraying them as foolish. The circulation of such an ideology allows men to subtly endorse their power and control over women (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005). In short, this article shows that, in Facebook posts, Pakistani men are reproducing the dominant cultural models of masculinity. However, the data also contain instances of a shift away from and (re)negotiation of these patriarchal representations. My findings also highlighted the existence on Facebook of emergent forms of hybrid models of masculinity where men choose to share their emotional side with their audience: a practice that is not common in Pakistani culture. Such models indicate a shift away from the traditional norms of a patriarchal society. In sum, this study found further evidence on Facebook in the Pakistani context that masculinity matters. This is significant, as traditionally men have been less discussed than women in the field of gender studies, especially in Pakistani research. Importantly, in contrast to the portrayal of Muslim men as a homogeneous group in previous studies (Manji, 2005), this study showed that other forms of masculinity currently exist alongside hegemonic masculinity in Pakistani Muslim communities.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributor

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