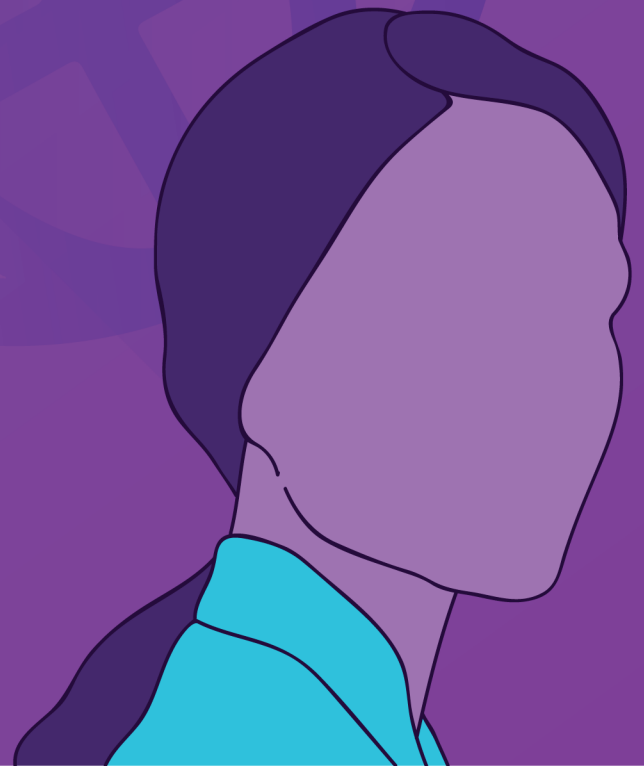


THE INTERNET AS WE SEE IT

Gendered perceptions from Pakistan



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*All our knowledge has its
origin in our perceptions*

- Leonardo da Vinci



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Foreword

“This phone is a curse” says A, a working class mother of three, frustrated with her husband’s endless infidelities, aided and supported by low cost, easily accessible mobile connection, “Is there anyway that I can get his SIM blocked and get him banned from using another one?”, she asks.

Ironically, she herself, is not allowed to own or use a cell phone, as in her family, women with cell phones are seen to be characterless. Even wanting a phone is seen as proof that the woman is pinning to talk to men and have extra marital relationships. This perception of what women with cell phones are like doesn’t just result in the restriction of mobile & Internet access, but has a direct spill over effect into the lives of these women. A’s former sister in law was subjected to severe physical abuse by her husband, her father in law and brother-in law (A’s husband) as one of them witnessed her talking on a phone. The story is not a unique one.

Preconceived notions and ideas about what happens on the Internet and what do women do with Internet, have played an undeniable role in restricting women’s access. Even those who do have access endure endless policing - not just by family but also by random strangers - often modifying their digital behaviour to minimise these pressures. On women’s only Facebook groups, it is common to see women advising other women to delete or suspend accounts if they are facing harassment. Silence and conceding space as the core means of protection, is an idea, that is so ingrained in our minds, that it seeps into the digital space and is seen as a natural and an effective response to digital violence. These ideas, these notions about how women should behave, ideals dictating what good women should share online and what they should not, how women should respond to threats, and notions like ‘men would be men’, aren’t merely social constructs fuelled by patriarchy - they are in fact, real and persistent threats to women’s digital access and experience.

When going through the list of research themes identified in the APC - GSMA toolkit, I connected with the theme of ‘perceptions’, because it is fascinating to see something intangible - an idea, some apprehensions, - having such a direct and tangible impact. Through this study, we aim to start documenting how perceptions of the Internet affect women’s use of ICTs. This is a brief, exploratory study and we hope to be able to expand the research in the coming years.



Sadaf Khan

Co Founder, Director

Media Matters for Democracy

July 2019

Executive Summary

The general understanding in Pakistan is that there are differences between the ways men and women access and use the Internet. These ideas come from the patriarchal nature of our society and the perceptions that exist in relation to men and women. This study aims to understand the Internet perceptions of Pakistani users specifically from the lens of gender. The idea is to explore how men and women perceive the opposite gender's use of the Internet and, in comparison, how they view their own gender's online engagement.

The research, which relied on focus group discussions, began by questioning the participants about their understanding of the term 'Internet' and built upon ideas about online experience from there. The study attempted to conduct an in-depth examination of the perceptions of male and female Internet users about the positive and negative effects of Internet activity in Pakistan.

The discussions were conducted separately with groups of men and women, and controlled for household income. The focus group methodology led to holistic discussions, encompassing various themes and issues related to the gendered perceptions and local attitudes about the Internet. The open-ended nature of the discussions allowed participants to express diverse ideas, exploring the complexities of Internet use and their own understanding. The study was exploratory in nature and can inform further research and policy ideas.

The research findings show that male and female Internet users are in agreement over the benefits offered by the Internet as well as the existence of several major issues that men and women face online. They claimed they use the Internet as a source of information and entertainment and as a medium for expression and connectivity in personal and professional capacities. They expressed similar concerns about Internet accessibility, its use, and its effects on individuals. They thought about issues such as data privacy, misinformation, and polarisation when they reflected on the negative aspects of the web. The study also shows research participants realised that different people, especially of the opposite gender, experience the Internet differently in Pakistan.

The study identifies that men and women Internet users may have a different perception of the nature and prevalence of harassment on the Internet. Ideas that inform our society at large also appeared to impact and inform the participants' perception of Internet use.

The main findings of the research are as follows:

- A majority of the participants defined the Internet in broad terms, encompassing the use of different apps and activities in online spaces. This shows that most people have an understanding of the wide and complex nature of the Internet.
- Connectivity and access to information were two ideas that featured prominently when discussing positive aspects of the Internet.
- There was consensus among participants that the way in which the other gender experienced the Internet was different to their own experience.

- Participants were resistant to the idea of labelling the Internet as an inherently negative medium. In fact a majority of the participants felt the internet had helped them within their academic or professional capacities.
- Male and female participants agreed that harassment was a prevalent issue on the Internet. They also agreed that men were largely the perpetrators in issues of harassment. However, they disagreed on the extent of harassment women faced online.
- Men and women also had different reactions to harassment. Women felt the consequences for harassment and threats they faced on the Internet could have serious ramifications for them. Women were also more likely to believe that they or other women users would alter their behaviour on the Internet due to harassment.
- Men were less likely to believe that they or other men would censor or restrict themselves due to harassment. Women also believed that men had more freedom to express themselves and their opinion on the Internet.
- All participants expressed concerns about data privacy and data usage. They referred to the use of their data by private organisations on the Internet without consent along with state surveillance.
- All participants expressed concern over the existing legal framework in Pakistan to protect their data on the Internet or the impact of laws to control or curb harassment.
- There was also consensus amongst participants that there are no effective legal, policy instruments available in Pakistan through which they can deal with the challenges they face on the Internet. Participants believed they would not receive help from law enforcement if they reported issues arising on the Internet.
- Participants also felt that the average Internet user was young, educated and belonged to a certain socio-economic class that gave them access to utilities and entertainment.
- Men were more likely to associate negative attributes with female Internet users. They were also more likely than women to view male Internet users positively.
- Women had mixed opinions about Internet users of their own gender. They associated both negative and positive qualities with them. Women also viewed negatively some of the attributes that men thought of as positive traits for a male user, such as the quality of being opinionated on the Internet.

SECTION I

INTRODUCTION



Chapter 1

Introduction & Literature Review

There is limited research in Pakistan on the gendered perceptions of the Internet as a whole. Studies that looked at how people view and understand the Internet in the country limited the scope of their work to a specific group of peoples such as students or have looked at a specific type of interaction online. Most of the research has been conducted using university students from the ages 18 to 25. The major reason for this appears to be ease of access to these students and the idea that young people are the most avid Internet users.

A study by Ali (2014) looked at Pakistani students' perceptions of the Internet relating to their academic activities. The study, which relied on a survey of 858 students, with a mean age of 21.5 years, found that most students disagreed with the idea that the Internet was a waste of time, and generally perceived the Internet to have a positive impact on their academic life. The study also found that the longer the students used the Internet, the more positive their perception of it became. There were also variations in response with regard to gender. Women were generally more likely to think that the Internet was mostly used for positive activities in relation to their academics. The students, overall, perceived that the Internet had a positive impact on their learning activities. The women were also more likely to agree with the idea that the Internet could be used for negative activities as well while men largely disagreed with this.

Ansari (2017) carried out a similar analysis on students of O-levels. The age group of the respondents in the survey was 15 to 17 years and the sample was limited to 40 students from one school in Karachi. The results though were similar to Ali's research where majority of the students perceived the Internet to be a positive addition in their lives where learning was concerned. They viewed it as a "revolutionary tool" that allowed them access to information of different levels.

Another study by Ali (2011) looked at the perceptions of the impact the Internet has had on relationships with the opposite sex, family and anonymous people. This study did not find any significant difference in the way men and women perceive the Internet and their relationships. It also looked at non-users of the Internet to compare how the use of the Internet changes perception. The study found significant differences between the opinions of those who had been using the Internet for two years or more and those who had not been using the Internet. Over all the study found that most people thought that the Internet had a positive impact on their familiar relationships. They viewed online relationships with the opposite sex more positively the longer they had been using the Internet and also said that the Internet had played an important role in meeting like-minded individuals.

Hassan, Unwin, and Gardezi (2018) in their study on sexual harassment through mobile devices start off by understanding the respondents' perceptions on the issue. The study has a wider focus than Internet use, since it looks at offline harassment through text and phone call too. Despite this, social media apps particularly Facebook and WhatsApp were named consistently by users as a means of harassment. The study differentiates

between perception and experience in their survey, first by asking respondents their opinion on issues and then asking them if they had ever experienced the said behaviour. In terms of perception it found that most people thought blackmail to be the most common form of harassment. Both genders thought men were more likely to harass and majority of the respondents — 54 percent — thought women were responsible for the harassment they received while only 37.9 percent held men responsible for the harassment they received. The study did not find any significant differences in the perceptions of men and women.

Student's perceptions of ethical behaviour on the Internet looked at how men and women thought of behaviour such as illegally downloading software, plagiarism or sharing and accessing someone else's data without permission. The study conducted by Jamal, Ferdoos, Zaman, and Hussain (2015) found differences in the perceptions of men and women, generally stating that women understood concepts of ethics better. It also found that women were more likely to believe that "showing disrespect to someone" online was unethical behaviour. It also looked at perceptions of security both men and women had online, showing that women were more likely to believe that sharing their name and location online was a security concern. This study differentiated between respondents on the basis of income, finding that those with a household income between Rs 25,000 and Rs 50,000 had a better understanding of their own online behaviour.

There is a plethora of research in Pakistan that understands the use of the Internet and how people experience it but the perceptions of users about the Internet is a different scholarly concern compared to people's experience or use of the web. The review of literature merits the need for more research on the differences in perception of the Internet by gender in Pakistan. This study is an exploratory research that aims to explore the themes around perceptions of the Internet in a holistic manner, specifically looking at gender as a factor, which in previous studies has been a secondary consideration.

Chapter 2 Methodology

Research Objectives

This research study explores perceptions of the Internet among male and female Internet users in Pakistan.

The research specifically focuses on the following questions:-

- What women and men think about the positive and negative effects the Internet has had or can have?
- What women and men think of the Internet generally, including trust and attitudes towards women's Internet access? and;
- What are the perceived challenges about usage of the Internet?

Research Methodology

The research was designed as a qualitative, exploratory study. It employed the use of Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs) as the main method of data collection. The FGDs method was selected primarily because of its potential to help explore Internet users' attitudes, perceptions and beliefs. The available literature on perceptions of the Internet was found to be focused on perceptions around specific areas of use. Since this particular research meant to explore general perceptions, it was important to select a method that would allow researchers to collect data in a setting where discourse could be encouraged. FGDs allow facilitators to encourage participants to explore attitudes and ideas and connect these to other attitudes, something that might not have been possible through survey questionnaires or in-person interviews.

The FGDs also helped observe reactions to differing beliefs and perceptions and created a more grounded understanding of how Internet users are looking at their own and others' engagement with the Internet. Additionally, seeing participants interact with different ideas and perceptions allowed the facilitators to gather valuable data evident in participants' non verbal responses and body language. The observational data was also used to inform the analysis.

Composition of the Focus Groups

A total of eight FGDs, with 5 - 10 respondents each, were conducted. The participants were divided into gender segregated groups, divided further by monthly household income. The household income variable was introduced to explore any differences in the way people from different socio economic strata perceive and engage with the Internet. The decision to hold the discussion within gender segregated groups was made to ensure homogeneity and encourage open and frank discussions, which may not have been possible if men and women were asked to comment on issues such as harassment and men's control over women's Internet use. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) state that homogenous groups are appropriate to "gain in-depth understanding about how

members of a particular group experience or think about a particular issue”, which fits with the research objectives of this study.

The FGDs were held in two cities - Islamabad and Karachi - both of which are metropolitan areas with little or no infrastructural barriers to Internet access. There were two FGDs per gender per income group. The number of focus group discussions are in line with the empirically-based findings of Guest, Namey, and McKenna (2016) who suggested that 80% of all themes are discoverable within two to three focus groups.

City	Income Group	Gender	Participants
Islamabad	Below Rs. 50,000	Women	7
Islamabad	Below Rs. 50,000	Men	7
Islamabad	Below Rs. 50,000	Women	10
Islamabad	Below Rs. 50,000	Men	7
Karachi	Below Rs. 50,000	Women	10
Karachi	Below Rs. 50,000	Men	7
Karachi	Below Rs. 50,000	Women	5
Karachi	Below Rs. 50,000	Men	10

Selection of Participants

The participants of the FGDs were selected through an open call, distributed through various social media platforms. The call asked interested participants to sign up for a discussion being conducted for a research on Perceptions of the Internet to evaluate the understanding users have of Internet usage and to explore the effects that women and men think using the Internet has had or can have.

The call and sign-up form were distributed in both English and Urdu languages and disseminated through Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp groups. The call was open for five days and the selection of final participants was made randomly from among those who had registered their interest.

Structure of the Focus Group Discussion

The FGDs followed a semi-structured format. Each FGD had six working sessions to explore different dimensions of Internet perceptions based on the sample questions under Research Topic 10 in “A toolkit for researching women’s internet access” prepared collaboratively by the Alliance for Affordable Internet, the World Wide Web Foundation, Association for Progressive Communications, and the GSMA. Instructions given to the facilitators moderating the FGDs are attached herewith as Annex 1.

The **first working session** was designed to develop an understanding of the perception of the term ‘Internet’. Each participant was asked to share what the Internet means to them. The responses were noted down and a brief discussion was held on the collective understanding of the Internet.

The **second working session** explored what the participants liked about the Internet. Using a worksheet (attached here as Annex 2), the participants identified the utility of the Internet for themselves and explored their own attitude towards that function. A loose discussion followed, exploring different ideas about the use of the Internet and what participants would and wouldn’t miss about it, if they were denied access.

The **third working session** explored perceptions of the Internet as an information source. The discussion was grounded through a basic grid made on a whiteboard (Attached here as Annex 3) to aid discussion on the credibility, efficiency and ease of access to relevant information on the Internet as compared to other information mediums, including TV, radio and newspapers.

The **fourth working session** was focused on exploring negative perceptions of the Internet and designed as an open discussion. The facilitators specifically explored the perceived impact of the Internet on relationships, sense of self and security. Differences in perceptions regarding the specific impacts on men and women were also explored.

The **fifth working session** explored perceptions about Internet users. In this session, there was a specific focus on the differences in perceptions of the male and the female users of the Internet. The discussion was aided through a working sheet, attached here as Annex 4.

The **sixth and the final working session** was a discussion on perceived challenges that are triggered due to the use of the Internet.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the FGDs was first transcribed. The facilitators of the FGDs and the research team identified approaches that were uniform across all groups and pinpointed areas where deviation in perceptions was visible. The data gathered from the

FGDs was arranged and summarised according to the key areas around which different sessions of the FGDs were structured.

The research team then analysed and interpreted the information provided by the FGD participants and gathered through observation of the group in light of the available literature and in accordance with the objectives of the study.

Chapter 3

Limitations of the Study

1. The total number of participants engaged through the FGDs was low. A total of 63 respondents took part in eight FGDs held in two cities. The size of population engaged was limited in accordance with the available resources. However, the research findings can only be called reflective of the beliefs of the participants and should neither be seen as being nationally representative nor generalisable for all Internet users in Pakistan.
2. The FGDs' participants were divided on the basis of two variables – gender and income groups. Both these variables were self-reported by the participants who registered. The threshold dividing the two income groups was Rs. 50,000 and participants were asked to sign up according to the total monthly household income. However, the researchers did not use any other means to verify the self-reported household income.
3. The FGDs were held in Islamabad - the federal capital - and Karachi – Pakistan's largest city by population. Both cities are highly urbanised and relatively technologically advanced than the rest of the country, and their residents have easy access to good quality Internet. The cities are also hubs of economic and political activity and residents are more likely to have access to growth opportunities. Both cities attract citizens from other parts of the country due to better employment opportunities and are thus metropolitan in nature. Thus, while the FGD participants were residents of Karachi and Islamabad, a number of them hailed from other, smaller cities of the country and could reflect upon attitudes and perceptions in their hometowns. That said, being residents of urban and relatively better connected cities with more chances of exposure to different communities and beliefs, the participants cannot be seen as a nationally representative cross-section of Internet users across Pakistan and the findings should be seen as being reflective only of the respondents' own beliefs and perceptions.
4. The discussion themes covered in the FGDs were basic and remained limited only to the perceptions around the Internet and its use itself. The research does not explore underlying factors that have influenced the perceptions of the respondents.

SECTION 2

FINDINGS



Chapter 4

The Internet as we see it:

Perceptions of the Internet

What is the Internet?

Men and women from all income groups had a similar understanding of what they perceived the Internet to be. Their perception came from their own usage of the Internet and so their experience informed their ideas or perceptions. For most respondents, connectivity, communication, and information aspects were amongst the first things that came to their minds. Google was the first tool that they mentioned, and it was seen as the gateway to the Internet. For communication, they mentioned the use of apps like WhatsApp and Facebook to speak to family and friends.

Focus group participants in all groups in Islamabad said that the Internet was also a place where they met like-minded individuals and formed connections outside of their family and friends. It was perceived to be a platform to express their identity and their opinion. This was also discussed specifically in the context of specific groups for people whose beliefs don't align with society at large or groups based on gender.

The discussion participants also associated the Internet with entertainment mentioning platforms like YouTube and Netflix. While one group of men with monthly household income above Rs. 50,000 didn't organically mention Netflix but the idea of the Internet as source of entertainment was present. Respondents also mentioned memes on Facebook as a source of entertainment.

The use of the Internet for service oriented uses was mentioned, with examples ranging from ride-sharing apps to LinkedIn, for professional networking. Participants also mentioned skill building, content creation and distribution as a use of the Internet.

Some participants said that they thought of a smartphone when asked about the Internet. The discussion also revolved around apps, which are used largely on the phone such as Snapchat or WhatsApp, even though participants did not specify on which platform and how they used these apps.

The respondents also perceive the Internet to be essential using terms like "oxygen" to define it. They also said it was an "ocean", "intangible" and "limitless." They were hesitant to discuss negative aspects of the Internet and were largely focusing on a positive usage.

Why wouldn't you miss the internet?

One of the main aspects that respondents said they would not miss about the Internet is the constant connectivity. Participants along all groups mentioned a constant pressure to respond to messages. Some female participants brought up spam messages that they receive on WhatsApp. Both men and women mentioned they felt constant conversation took place on WhatsApp groups. The respondents viewed disconnecting from the

the Internet as a way of reconnecting with other aspects of their lives. For instance one respondent said, "...shut your mobile off and sit with your family, with your cousins. You feel the difference, you know, (with) talking and sitting. Talking like this (in-person) and using the mobile are two different things. So that feels nice."

Women specifically mentioned issues of harassment on the Internet. One female participant likened the Internet to a public space, saying that like all public spaces women also face harassment on the Internet. There was some discussion on whether the Internet itself was responsible for the harassment since it made it easier for people to share their opinions without consequences.

Another aspect that was discussed was in the context of sharing their opinion on online platforms where participants said they would not miss the constant judgement and debate that existed on social media platforms. While respondents felt that websites like Twitter had given them a voice, they also thought these same platforms have a negative impact on people.

One respondent said, "...there are some people who say absolute nonsense on the Internet because you know they have the way and right to speak."

Others mentioned disinformation on the Internet, using the popular term "fake news" for it. They also felt that the Internet and apps like Facebook create echo chambers which only allow people to interact with information that they want to interact with. The respondents viewed this as a negative aspect of the Internet, saying while they would miss access to information, they would not miss the constant barrage of opinions they get.

Why do you like the Internet?

The things that the participants thought they liked most about the Internet had largely to do with the convenience it offers them. They spoke about things being more accessible on the Internet, be it looking for directions on Google maps or speaking with friends and family who were not living in the same city or country.

Accessibility created by the Internet had wider implications, and different people thought of different areas or aspects of their lives that the Internet had made more convenient. Some respondents mentioned entertainment. One respondent talked about how the Internet had made entertainment cheaper saying, "The thing is with Internet, entertainment is very cheap, because you can download a movie but if you have to watch a movie you'll have to buy a ticket that's like 800 rupees and then sometimes you can't get the right show that's for you."

Another aspect participants mentioned was access to information. The respondents said they thought the Internet kept them "up to date" on things happening around them. These ranged from general news about current events to personal news about friends and family. There was some discussion on whether the Internet was a reliable source of information or not. Despite this respondents overall felt that the Internet kept them more informed and aware.

Working professionals within the groups also mentioned that they liked the opportunities the Internet offers them to promote their work and also increase their skills. They said they liked the Internet because it helped them to build their skills and social media made it easy for them to put their work out there and reach people. One participant mentioned how she learnt coding skills by looking at YouTube tutorials while another mentioned how she used Instagram to reach an audience for her work easily.

Chapter 5

Internet and information:

Seeing the Internet as an information source

Ease of Access

All participants, men and women, felt that the Internet was better than TV, radio, and newspapers in terms of ease of access to information. One respondent referred to the voice command system saying “You don’t even have to type sometimes, just say whatever you want.”

The respondents also felt that the Internet allowed them the easiest access to multiple sources of information at the same time, which added to its convenience as a news source.

Credibility

There were some concerns about the credibility of news available on the Internet. The respondents identified disinformation prevalent on the Internet as a reason for their concerns. They felt editorial checks in newspapers made them a more credible source of information. They thought the same level of editorial checks did not exist in online spaces. Some participants also differentiated between credible and non-credible sources of news online, saying that they would trust mainstream news organisations on the Internet that were also known to be credible sources of news offline.

The participants who did say they viewed the Internet as a credible source of news believed the Internet makes it easier to cross-check information. They said the Internet offered multiple sources of information and so people could easily look at different views or versions. This idea was challenged by other participants who referred to the idea of online spaces becoming echo chambers, confirming a person’s own beliefs and biases, and said this would prevent individuals from researching a news item that confirmed their own beliefs.

Relevant Information

The Internet was considered by the participants to be the best medium for getting personally relevant information on an issue or topic because of the availability of filters which allow people to set their own preferences.

Chapter 6

The bad and the ugly:

Negative aspects of Internet's usage

There were some prevalent themes that came up in all discussions. Participants mentioned a wide variety of perceptions that they had about the negative impact of the Internet on the lives of Internet users. Respondents were generally able to differentiate between their own experience and those of others, especially from a gendered perspective.

Harassment

Harassment was one of the most prevalent issues that came up and was discussed extensively during the focus group discussions. There was agreement across all groups that harassment existed in online spaces and women experienced it more than men. In women's groups there was a larger consensus that men were perpetrators of harassment.

In the group of women with monthly household income above Rs. 50,000, participants said they thought the Internet was like any other public space and harassment was a consequence of women being in these spaces. Women narrated instances when they had faced harassment online. A common means of harassment that women identified was through unsolicited messages. Some women identified pornographic videos that they received through WhatsApp.

Women also mentioned online harassment in the context of men being "triggered" when women posted something online, especially if the opinion they were posting was feminist or discussed feminism positively. Women said this often led to threats which then created privacy concerns for them.

Men acknowledged that Pakistani women experience harassment in online spaces, however there was some disagreement over who was responsible and the extent of it. Some of the men with household income less than Rs. 50,000 admitted that men were largely responsible for the harassment that women faced online but felt uncomfortable and embarrassed to do so. Some men with household income above Rs. 50,000 felt that harassment wasn't as prevalent as women said it was. They also believed that women exaggerated their experiences of online harassment.

There was also a difference in how men with monthly household income above Rs. 50,000 defined harassment. While women across the board considered unsolicited messages to be a form of harassment, some men did not think unsolicited messages could be as harassing as women said they were. Men said that women also got more attention online. They felt if a woman posted a picture or status, she would get more "likes" on it.

Participants in all the women groups said women were more likely to change their behaviour online due to harassment. They said that they would self-censor their posts, think twice before posting or be more careful about the forums or groups they were

posting in, to ensure that they would be sharing information only with like-minded individuals.

Privacy and Data

Both men and women had concerns about how the data they shared online and data that was being stored by different social media apps could be used. There were questions raised about state surveillance, as well. Some women mentioned incidents like the Cambridge Analytica scandal, to discuss global threats to privacy.

Men and women also mentioned surveillance by employers and universities on social media. They discussed examples and shared anecdotes that showed how views expressed on social media had been used by employers and admission offices to deny someone a job or an admission. One participant narrated an incident where someone they knew was refused admission to a private university abroad, due to views they had expressed on Twitter.

Women's concerns about privacy though extended beyond larger issues of data use and took a more personal narrative as well. Women mentioned the use of pictures, where photos of themselves they posted online could be morphed onto different images. They also mentioned how pictures they posted online were also used to solicit marriage proposals by "rishta aunties" which they felt was an invasion of their privacy and space online.

They also expressed problems with ideas about encryption, saying that a screenshot is a workaround used by perpetrators of harassment when it comes to encrypted conversations and data. There was a general consensus that nothing on the Internet is private.

Restrictions on Use

The consensus among all groups was that men do restrict women's access to the Internet and online spaces. Participants believed that in Pakistan, men control their partners' use of the Internet, restricting them for talking to male colleagues. Men from different income groups believed that while it was acceptable for them to restrict their partners' Internet usage, it was not okay for their partners to do the same. They openly discussed examples where men had restricted online access of their female partners or spouse, but distanced themselves from the people they mentioned and the act itself. Men with monthly household income above Rs. 50,000 were more aggressive about denying their role in restricting access to women.

One male respondent from the below Rs. 50,000 household income slab mentioned how in his village women's access to the Internet was limited to communication apps, primarily WhatsApp.

During the focus group discussions, women agreed that they needed to have some knowledge of their partners' digital activity. Women also agreed with the idea that there was a significant amount of monitoring of digital activity by men. This was not only in the context of their partners or spouses but also in relation to their siblings or children.

Outside of the partner/spouse relationship, another type of restriction that women mentioned was of parental control. They mentioned how they had to restrict their usage of the Internet because they were not given permission by their parents to access some apps. In other cases, they had to restrict how they expressed themselves online due to family and social pressure. Women also mentioned that their families would prevent them from sharing images on the Internet, especially on social media for fear of misuse. They felt that if they had built trust with their parents or enjoyed a “good relationship”, then they would be able to use the Internet more freely.

Women also self-censored and restricted their own usage of the Internet. One of the common reasons for this was again the fear of harassment. Women said they were more likely to curtail their opinion online based on their own judgement of what type of reaction they would get, rather than pressure from other individuals.

Both men and women also said they censored their opinion on issues of religion. They felt religion could become a really divisive issue and lead to serious consequences. Participants brought up cases such as the murder of Mashal Khan, where individuals had expressed themselves online only to be faced with serious allegations of blasphemy and, in some cases, physical violence. Some also expressed the opinion that this was more dependent on the type of outreach each person had. The general consensus was that if what you post online reaches a wider audience then it is better to restrict yourself and curtail opinions.

Participants also discussed access and affordability of Internet services. As part of the conversation, they mentioned the use of smartphones and how it had increased. Some participants felt that mobile phone data packages offered by telecom companies were cheap and had made the Internet more accessible. Others disagreed with this idea saying that smartphones that allow you to fully benefit from the various apps are expensive. Respondents also referred to areas in the country where all telecom companies do not operate such as areas in the northern region of Pakistan.

Impact on Relationships

The conversation on relationships during the focus group discussions also showed the impact people felt the Internet had on their relationships. This was mentioned both in terms of romantic partner/spouse relationships and familial relationships.

The impact on familial relationships was largely felt due to a communication gap that the participants felt the Internet created. This stemmed from the idea that people used virtual means to connect with people more often than meeting in-person. Some participants felt that virtual means, through the Internet, were limited in expression and could not convey tone and emotion properly which could lead to miscommunication.

The focus group participant also felt that technology, and as a byproduct of it, the Internet had increased the generational gap. They also said that they thought this had created a gap in value systems. Despite this, participants were resistant to the idea that the Internet in itself was a corrupting force. They did not believe that young people are being led astray due to the Internet.

As far as interpersonal relationships were concerned between spouses or romantic partners, the respondents felt that the Internet was the cause of some conflict. They felt that the Internet had made relationships more difficult because there was a constant comparison with other people and the images they were putting out on social media. Participants mentioned a need to constantly project a happy relationship. The participants felt it created a trust deficit between partners, leading to one partner becoming jealous.

Some men with household income below Rs. 50,000 also framed their own jealous reactions as part of protecting their partners or ensuring their security. On the other hand, they viewed their partners' jealous reactions as being irrational.

There was also the idea among men in the focus group discussions that the Internet had made it easier for people to cheat on their partners. While the participants did not believe that the Internet itself caused the cheating, but they did say that it made other people more accessible, increasing the opportunities to cheat.

Within the men's groups, there was also discussion of how pornography sets unrealistic standards and expectations for sexual activity, which could have a direct impact on people's marital lives and could potentially lead to divorce. Most of the men, however, did not comment on the idea any further.

Mental Health

Respondents in all focus groups spoke about various impacts that the Internet and related activities could have on the mental health of users. One concern that came up was that social media put a lot of pressure on individuals to present a certain image. They felt that people are not truthful about their lives, presenting a larger than life online personality, which leads to an inferiority complex in those consuming that content. This, they felt, could demotivate individuals, creating envy about other people's life and achievements.

Participants also mentioned that this encouraged consumerism, where they felt these images put pressure on them to buy the same brands to present a similar image. This was also mentioned in the context of children and teenagers, who consumed content on social media and then put pressure on their parents to get them similar things. Participants felt this social pressure created mental health concerns.

Another aspect that was mentioned was an addiction to the Internet, where users found it hard to put away their phone or devices on which they were sharing or consuming online content. Participants also discussed online gaming as an addictive activity, saying that it made young people more likely to disconnect from people in their surroundings. Some participants mentioned the game PUBG, narrating anecdotes about their siblings who would not respond or pay attention to them when playing the game.

Participants considered gaming and other activities on the Internet to be isolating, where they felt excessive use could lead to mental health issues.

Misinformation

Participants in all groups discussed the Internet as a source of both misinformation and disinformation. Respondents mentioned various avenues through which they felt this type of information was promoted. They felt it was difficult for the average user to check sources of information on the Internet. This made it hard for them to decide which source to trust.

One of these was fake profiles on Facebook. Participants felt the Internet gives people the space to remain anonymous, which also makes it hard to trust the information that they were getting online. Women specifically said that they do not fully trust Internet user accounts.

Participants also talked about WhatsApp groups and messages that they got through these groups. They felt that a lot of these messages were circulated without any cross-checking. Some of the messages that the participants mentioned were those that appeared to be government notifications about a threat in a specific area or change in policy.

The promotion of extremist content and Islamophobia was also discussed. This was done both as the information itself being a negative aspect of the Internet and categorised as being misleading or untrue. Participants felt it was based on false ideas and had a lot of power to impact young people to radicalise them.

Chapter 7

The Internet User

Perceptions of Men and Women Users of the Internet

The previous sections of this report explore perceptions about the utility, benefits and negative and positive impacts of the Internet. This section specifically focuses on the perceptions regarding the characteristics of the male and female Internet users in Pakistan. The discussion specifically sought to identify the traits that are assigned to male and female users and how these perceived characteristics may result in increasing control of women's access and usage of the Internet.

General perceptions of the Internet users

While there are significant differences in the way male and female users of the internet are being perceived, the population demographic assigned by participants to the perceived Internet users is similar – the average male and female Internet userIntern was seen as predominantly young, somewhat educated and connected for both utility and entertainment. While there was a difference in the frequency with which negative attributes were assigned to male and female users, almost everyone agreed that all the negative attributes mentioned were also present in the other gender to a certain extent.

There was consensus that the male and female users of the Internet experience the Internet in different ways and there are some differences in the personalities and motivations of male and female users connecting to the Internet in the country.

Specific attributes assigned to men and women using the Internet follow.

Perceptions about Pakistani male users of the Internet

There were differences in the way men and women described their perceptions of the male users of the Internet. Men from both income groups and in both cities attributed various positive traits to the male user and women attributed more negative traits to them. The following attributes were recurrent in the discussion:-

Attributes assigned to the male users by women

Women participants ascribing properties to male users of the Internet mentioned that men seem to have a lot of time on their hands and appear to be online almost all the time. They used terms like farigh awam- meaning people without anything substantial to do- to describe the male users, and said that they seem to be using the Internet to take out their frustration.

Opinionated

Women from all four focus groups commented on the expression of political and other kinds of opinion by men, holding that the male users don't care if they have any information about their subject of choice or not, but seem to express opinions as a way of taking out their own frustrations. Within the context of the conversation and the examples given, it was apparent that 'opinionated' was generally being used as a negative qualifier to describe male users of the Internet. One participant said that male users find it "easier to bring their opinion as compared to females. When two people are talking about the same thing, like if two people are talking about gender equality, or on other sensitive issues, so it's easier for men to point their opinion as they have a lot of people supporting their opinion".

Sleazy / Creepy

Women participants mentioned male users as being sleazy and creepy multiple times. These qualifiers were used both to describe the actual personality of the male users and to define their conduct online. Multiple women brought up the issue of men sending unsolicited messages of inappropriate nature as an example of their sleazy behaviour. Women repeatedly mentioned being "approached" by men, through unsolicited messages on Facebook, WhatsApp and other mediums and appeared to hold it as one of the most defining characteristics of the male users of the Internet. There was also an agreement among various participants that this sleazy behaviour was not affected by the education and socio economic class of the male user and often extends to men known by the participants.

Harassers

Women in all groups also made references to harassment by men. In all groups, either within the worksheet or during the discussions, the term "harasser" or "engaged in harassment" was used. Some also used "criminal" to define the male users. Other similar terms used to describe behaviour that can be classified as harassment included "stalkers", "sexually frustrated, taking out their frustration online" and "abusive". Multiple users mentioned that male users "send nudes" indicating another variance of harassing behaviour that was being attributed to male users.

Free to conduct themselves as they wish

The freedom that men have to conduct themselves as per their own wishes online was brought up through different examples. While this is not a direct attribute assigned to the male user, this was one of the main qualifiers used by women participants to describe the male user's experience of the Internet. In a way, this freedom was mentioned as one of the basic elements defining male attitudes and conduct online. Women also expressed opinions about the reasons that allowed male users to have this freedom, including perceptions about their personality like "men don't care" (if harassed or sent unsolicited messages). Other factors that were mentioned by participants talking about the freedom men enjoy online included references to the "opinionated" trait that was assigned to the male user. There wasn't a mention of any external factors that influence the perceived freedom with which male users access and utilise the Internet.

Attributes assigned to the male users by men

Leaders

In the focus group discussions with men, various leadership attributes were assigned to the Pakistani male users of the Internet. Men perceived male users to be good managers, informed, team players and multitaskers. The term “leaders”, “motivational” and “game changer” were also used to describe the male user. Another attribute that was assigned to the male user was “good with conflict resolution”, again adding to the perceived leadership potential of male users of the Internet. Another trait that was mentioned by multiple men was confidence.

Social

Various participants referred to male users as being socially active. Participants held that men who use the internet are better connected with family and friends and remain socially active in groups.

Professional

Multiple male participants of the FGDs stated that male users are professional and career oriented. Other qualifiers used were “focused on work”, “connected to gain knowledge about work issues” and keen to increase knowledge. Others saw male users as “businessmen” and felt that they use the Internet for various professional needs ranging from marketing and outreach to research about their product and similar businesses.

Other traits

Some participants talked about perceptions on which there was no general consensus. There was a mention of men as hackers in one of the groups in Karachi. A small number of participants also termed male users as “manipulators” and others said that male users tend to be lazy and tend to waste time online. Aggressive and opinionated behaviour were also mentioned as traits of male users by some participants. While a majority of women made some reference to men being sleazy in one way or another, only a minority of men participating in the FGDs mentioned men as being “sexually frustrated”, “horny” and “online to get girls”.

Some women also mentioned that men online are easily triggered by discussions on feminism and women’s rights.

Perceptions about Pakistani female users of the Internet

Attributes assigned to the female users by women

Informed

The use of Internet for information was mentioned in multiple contexts. Some participants saw female users’ access to information as an identifier demonstrating them to be ambitious and career oriented. While others defined information largely in a

domestic context, talking about information related to housekeeping, parenting and cooking. In both cases, women perceived the female users to be informed and passionate about the acquisition of said information.

Fashion Conscious & Attention Seeking

There were multiple references about female users being fashion conscious and concerned about their looks. Some participants mentioned that women use the Internet to keep themselves updated about the latest fashion trends. Participants also made comments referring to the sharing of photographs by women users as an attempt to demonstrate that they are fashionable and saw this as an attention seeking behavior.

'Rishta Aunties'

Rishta Aunties refer to women who are on the lookout for marriage proposals and prospects for matchmaking. While this is not a personality trait, it is important to mention it within this section as references to Rishta Aunties were made by multiple women in all four women groups. Most participants expressed frustration with female users who are seen to scour Facebook groups and other platforms in an attempt to find rishtas (marriage prospects) for the men in their families. Various anecdotes on being approached by such users were shared. One participant said that these rishta aunties "just slide into your DMs and ask for your pictures to be shown for marriage purposes". Women mentioned that such users make them feel uncomfortable.

Attributes assigned to the female users by men

Emotional & Insecure

Male participants of the FGDs perceived female users of the Internet to be emotional and insecure. One participant said that women who use the Internet are easily triggered by anything. Others mentioned women's insecurity online, saying that female users remain insecure about the Internet use of their partners and have emotional and unreasonable reactions. One participant said, "Women's insecurity is accelerated by the use of the Internet, to the point that they become judgemental".

Shopoholics

Multiple references were made about women's consumerism online and their online shopping. Male users mentioned that women are more likely than men to shop for products online. Some references defined women users as "designers", connecting that to beauty consciousness and related shopping.

Attention Seeking

There were some references to attention seeking attitudes. In these references, participants referred to women users sharing photographs and personal issues online, showing that men tend to view women's expression about their own selves as attention seeking behaviour online. The same perception also existed in women's groups.

Other attributes

A few other attributes were also assigned to female users of the Internet, but there was no larger consensus of these attributes.

A few participants mentioned feminism in connection with the female users, saying that women who use Internet are feminists, and often “too feminist”. There were a couple of references to women’s use of the Internet to watch cooking shows, acquiring recipes and getting information about other domestic tasks and skills. Participants who mentioned this utility of the Internet for women, saw the users as being good cooks and housewives. Similar opinions were presented by some men with regards to mothers who use the Internet, with one participant noting that “women use the internet to get information about children”.

Limited references were made to women as harassers, but some participants did say that some women also engage in harassment of men. Some participants also identified that the female users are more likely to face harassment.

Chapter 8

Challenges and More

Perceived challenges of Internet Usage

This chapter explores perceptions about challenges and issues that are connected to the use of Internet in Pakistan. The chapter presents participants' perception about general challenges presented by Internet as well as gender specific attitudes that define the experience of women online.

Harassment

Both men and women identified that harassment online remains one of the key challenges that affects the use of the Internet by women. While some references were made to men also facing harassment, all participants seemed to be in agreement about the fact that women face harassment more frequently than men. It was also clear that the extent and nature of this harassment was understood differently by different participants – so while there was a general agreement, there were also references made to women being too “sensitive”, “emotional”, “easily triggered” and also “misunderstanding” the comments received by them. A couple of participants also felt that while harassment was a real challenge for women, the instances and nature of harassment were exaggerated.

In women's groups, harassment was seen as one of the most defining factors of women's conduct online. Women said that they “backed off”, deleted or suspended profiles, became less vocal and avoided talking about “sensitive issues” to ensure that they do not face harassment.

Women also referred to specific instances and experiences about their own Internet use to demonstrate why they see harassment and other kinds of digital violence as a key challenge to the way they use the Internet. It is important to note that the anecdotes shared by women to demonstrate the extent of harassment were not limited to social media, but extended to the use of their mobile phones. Insistent and unwelcome messages on WhatsApp by unknown numbers, acquaintances and Careem and Uber drivers were mentioned by multiple women, who held that these kinds of behaviour made them significantly modify how they use the Internet and mobile devices.

There was also a general agreement that men and women respond differently to the challenge of harassment. In all the focus groups, there was a general consensus that women facing harassment are more likely to leave their space and opt for silence than men facing the same issue. It was also obvious that most participants agreed with women's perceived choice of leaving space as the better and safer choice. Women felt that if they continue to remain online when faced with harassment, the situation might escalate and they might have to face real life consequences.

The reference to harassment and opting for silence in face of it was not restricted to sexual harassment. Women targeted for political expression and other opinions also felt that it was safer to disengage and leave the space. There was a general perception among

both men and women groups that men tend to continue engaging on forums where bullying and harassment is happening and women tend to leave these spaces. There was also a perception among women that men tend to stay and engage in these spaces because men just “don’t care about being bullied” and are used to such behaviour even among their peer groups. On the other hand, there were multiple comments about women being “too sensitive” even when something isn’t “such a big deal”.

Threats to privacy

Threats to privacy were also identified as one of the key challenges for both men and women. The threat to privacy was mentioned within two frames.

The first frame was **the misuse of pictures by other users**. Women feared editing or morphing of images for blackmail, the sharing of their pictures in other groups without their consent and using pictures for character assassination. Some women also mentioned being approached for proposals by other women, and perceived this as a threat to their privacy as well.

Another frame through which the loss of privacy was seen was the **general loss of control of personal content** that was shared online. Examples given to demonstrate this challenge ranged from the unauthorised use of work to the dissemination of pictures and opinions in forums that they were not intended for. Some women mentioned that their opinions were shared further and out of context resulting in misunderstandings and conflict. Others mentioned the trend of “oversharing” for example through signing in to locations and threats that can arise from making such information public.

Some participants mentioned that young girls online might not be cognisant of the threat that this loss of privacy can pose to them. There was a difference in the way men and women approached the same challenge. Women participants, when talking about loss of privacy focused more on strategies they can employ to minimise harm – for example only posting group pictures or not posting pictures at all while men talking about the same thing, remained more focused on simply commenting on this as a challenge and did not particularly mention specific strategies that male users might employ to counter the loss of privacy. However, when prompted, men did mention that women often regulate their own use of Internet to counter this challenge.

There wasn’t much discussion on access to data by corporations and governments, and a majority of the participants stayed focused on privacy as a part of their own digital experience. Not many comments were made about corporate policies or local laws related to data protection and privacy and there seemed to be a general consensus that threats to privacy were a challenge inherent to the use of the Internet.

Controls on women’s access and use of Internet

Both men and women participants agreed that there is a certain level of control exercised by men of the family to regulate the use of the Internet by women. Men from lower income bracket in Islamabad admitted that they themselves exercised a certain level of control on how women in their families used the Internet and used a ‘protection and safety’ frame to justify their intentions. In another men’s group, there was a certain

disassociation with the act of controlling women's use of the Internet; however, there was a general agreement that women's use of the Internet is more controlled. A participant mentioned that these controls were simply an extension of the social norms exercised in the regions.

A number of women participants noted that educating their parents about the Internet can help in reducing the level of control but also acknowledged that this is probably true only for a small number of young female users.

Impact on Relationships

Both men and women talked about the challenge of balancing digital and virtual lives and agreed that the extensive use of the Internet can result in users ignoring their families. This perception came up both in the session specifically focused on challenges and in multiple other sessions. Frequent users of the Internet were seen as distanced from the family and unable or unwilling to "give time to family members at home". The impact of extensive Internet use on romantic relationships, between spouses and partners, was also seen as challenging – participants mentioned that women tend to get insecure when witnessing their partners' activity online and this can lead to serious consequences for the relationships.

Challenges resulting from political expression

Multiple participants mentioned facing hate speech and bullying when they expressed political opinions online. Some mentioned that they were misunderstood as their comments were seen out of context. Others talked about the lack of visual cues, such as body language, which make communication online more difficult to understand and can lead to miscommunication.

Misinformation

Confirming the credibility and authenticity of information distributed digitally was also seen as a challenge. One participant mentioned that there is a lack of understanding about "fake news" and people can get influenced by false information. There was also a general perception that older users of the Internet might be more likely to face this challenge due to limited understanding of technology.

Perceptions about means of countering the identified challenges

There was a general perception that there are no effective legal or policy instruments available through which the challenges can be dealt with. Participants did not believe that they will receive any help from law enforcement if they contacted them for help. They did not appear to have a good understanding of the law itself, but there was a general perception that implementation of the available law was flawed, and no action will be taken even if they registered complaints.

Most of the participants did not talk about the rules, standards and reporting mechanisms of the social media platforms as a viable method of seeking redressal from the identified threats.

There was a mention of social attitudes and norms as instruments of control and consequently, there was no mention of using allies, communities and family as support groups that can help Internet users deal with the challenges.

SECTION 3

ANALYSIS



Chapter 9 Analysis and Discussion

The participants, both men and women, showed a wide understanding of the term Internet. At the beginning of each focus group discussion when asked to define what the term “Internet” meant to them, they mentioned a wide variety of activities that required the use of different types of devices and apps. These activities included using the Internet to socialise but also things such as gaming and sharing pictures online. They also understood that there was ubiquity of Internet use, where everyone used the Internet for a different purpose. For instance the participants realised that there were differences between the use of the Internet for professional and personal purposes. When discussing professional use, participants mentioned the use of laptops but when discussing personal use they largely spoke about the use of a smartphone.

Despite this, throughout the course of the discussions, participants referred to the use of apps that were primarily used on a smartphone. Their answers also focused largely on the use of apps that allowed them to connect and socialise with other people. This was particularly interesting because participants felt that the Internet had a negative impact on their interpersonal relationships and could also be isolating.

Some of the results of this study confirmed the findings of research done on the use and perception of Internet in Pakistan before. The idea that the Internet is a corrupting force or is in some way a bad influence was rejected by majority of the participants, especially young people in the focus group discussions. This was in line with research conducted on perceptions of the internet among students by Ansari (2017) and Ali (2014).

They felt that the Internet was not in itself negative but rather used negatively by people. They resisted this idea when referring to cheating in romantic and marital relationships or the behaviour of young Internet users in Pakistan. Participants felt that the Internet in some cases might amplify or make it easier to act out on negative urges, but they seemed to believe the urge itself existed because of human nature and issues within relationships that had nothing to do with the Internet.

Participants also rejected the idea that the Internet itself was the cause of the generational gap. They felt it exposed them to new ideas but the generational gap was largely a result of a changing world.

For news online, both men and women had similar concerns about the content they were consuming. There was disagreement about the credibility of news on the Internet but all participants agreed that it was the best medium in terms of ease of access to information and it also offered them the most relevant content.

This study also found a sense of positivity where the use of the Internet for academic activities was concerned like Ansari (2017) and Ali (2014). Students in the focus group discussions felt the Internet was a source of knowledge and learning for them. One of the most prevalent associations which people had with the Internet was the search engine Google, which students said they use for research. This study also found that

professionals viewed the Internet to be a tool for updating their skills or learning new skills. The idea of the Internet as a content creation and distribution tool was also discussed which shows that in general the Internet has positive connotations for people.

The participants, however, were not ignorant of the negative uses or negative ideas associated with the Internet. They seemed to understand the complexity of the Internet and the consequences it had. The participants mentioned mental health problems as a result of social pressure created through social media where people shared pictures of a seemingly perfect life. They also saw that Internet use could create strain between relationships.

Like Ali (2011), this research also did not find any particular differences between how men and women viewed the impact the Internet has on relationships. In the detailed discussions though, male participants admitted they felt their own jealous reactions to the interaction of their partner or spouse with people of the opposite gender were rational but if their partner had the same reactions, they believed the partners were acting irrationally.

There were differences in the access both genders believed women had. All participants, men and women, identified similar reasons for why women's access to the Internet was limited. Men, during their focus groups, discussed how access to the Internet for women is limited due to social factors, where restrictions are placed by family and spouses. Women discussed these restrictions in the context of their parents and how extended families, often took offence to things they posted online, causing them to self-censor and restricting their own use of various apps. Both men and women felt that building trust within their relationships would help increase women's access to the Internet. There was a general agreement that men could use the Internet with more ease and freedom than women.

Men and women participants appeared to have a different definition and understanding of what constitutes harassment in online spaces. Women felt that unsolicited messages on social networking and messaging apps was a breach of their space and considered it an example of the harassment they face online. Men disagreed with this idea, especially one group of men with household income above Rs. 50,000, and felt that women generally exaggerated and overplayed the existence of online harassment. Despite this, like the study by Hassan, Unwin, and Gardezi (2018), all participants believed men were largely responsible for the harassment of women in online spaces.

While men were reluctant and embarrassed to discuss harassment on the Internet, there was recognition that it did exist. All participants also recognised that the consequences of harassment for men and women were significantly different and it curtailed the use and behaviour of women in online spaces. It also shows that online harassment of women specifically has reached a point where it can no longer be denied. The reasons men and women give for it differ, but there is agreement that women are harassed in online spaces and they are forced to curtail and curate their behaviour and usage as a result of the harassment they face.

Concerns about privacy were also different for women and the participants said women Internet users in Pakistan went to greater lengths to ensure their privacy online. This

meant that women were self-censoring significantly more than men online. Women discussed specific examples and instances of how they had been prevented from sharing their name, location or pictures online because they felt this would create a very real and imminent threat for their physical safety. Men's concerns about data privacy were more in line with larger conversations about data usage and surveillance by the state and other private organisations. This, once again, goes to show how both genders understand and perceive threats on the Internet. Women participants believed the consequences can come back to affect them in a very real sense and impact their lives; men did not have the same concern.

This is not to say that women were not concerned about the use of their data in the larger sense. Their perception of privacy issues on the Internet was more layered than men: they felt more strongly about the "public" nature of online posts despite privacy filters and policies of Internet companies, and they addressed directly issues such as self-censorship, reputational harm, physical harm, and surveillance in connection with privacy.

In assigning qualities to male and female users of the internet, there were differences in how each gender viewed itself and the opposite gender. Certain qualities and actions that men viewed positively were discussed by women as a negative idea. For instance both men and women stated that men on the internet were opinionated. Men, thought this to be a reflection of their leadership qualities which showed that they were informed and could discuss a wide variety of issues. Women had a more negative connotation for the same quality they associated with men. They felt it showed men were frustrated and uneducated, commenting on issues they didn't understand.

Men generally also had a negative perception of women on the internet. These perceptions though stemmed from stereotypes that are part of a larger patriarchal system and did not have to do specifically with use of the Internet.

Men were also more likely to associate positive qualities with their own gender, while women had a mixed response. Women associated negative qualities, such as being lazy, with Internet users of their own gender.

In this part of the discussion where participants were asked to associate qualities with Internet users of both genders, the idea that men were more free to express themselves online also came about. However, there was some discussion on why they were able to do this. It seemed that women believed that men's ability to remain unaffected by harassment online was an innate quality and not a result of patriarchal barriers.

In assigning qualities to male and female users of the Internet, there were differences in how each gender viewed itself and the opposite gender. Certain qualities and actions that men viewed positively were discussed by women as a negative idea. For instance, both men and women stated that men on the Internet were opinionated. Men largely thought this to be a reflection of their leadership qualities which showed that they were informed and could discuss a wide variety of issues. Men in one group with household income above Rs. 50,000 did not express this sentiment. They viewed men being opinionated in online spaces as a negative quality.

All female participants had negative connotation for the same quality they associated

with men. They felt it showed men were frustrated and uneducated, commenting on issues they didn't understand.

Men generally also had a negative perception of women on the Internet. These perceptions though seemed to stem from stereotypes that are part of a larger patriarchal system and did not appear to be specifically due to the use of the Internet.

Men were also more likely to associate positive qualities with their own gender, while women had a mixed response. Women associated negative qualities with Internet users of their own gender.

The idea that men were more free to express themselves online also came about in the discussion where participants were asked to associate qualities with Pakistani Internet users of both genders. However, there was some discussion on why they were able to do this. It seemed women believed that men's ability to remain unaffected by harassment online was an innate quality and not a result of patriarchal barriers.

All participants felt that there was no legal recourse in the face of online threats, harassment and issues of data privacy. In some cases participants did not know of laws that existed while in other cases they felt these laws or associated government agencies did not do enough to protect them or remedy the situation. This was shown in the female participants discussion on self-censorship, where they felt they would disable their accounts online or not post content of a certain type if they were harassed or threatened online.

Where data privacy was concerned, the participants felt there was no transparency on how their data was used or stored by the apps they used. They also felt there was no legal recourse in case their data was misused. Participants also expressed concerns about state surveillance and their data being used by the state.

Chapter 10 Recommendations

1. The issue of harassment dominated the discussion in sessions on negative perceptions and challenges related to Internet use in Pakistan. It is obvious that the frequency of harassment and digital violence has a direct impact on women's use of the Internet.

To tackle the issue of harassment, it is recommended that;

i. The government and law enforcement agencies should improve the implementation of relevant sections in the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), so that women facing harassment can feel confident about initiating legal actions against perpetrators of digital harassment.

ii. Relevant government bodies and state institutions should initiate gender sensitivity training of law enforcement agencies including police departments and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), so they can engage with survivors of digital harassment in a more sensitive and efficient manner. Sensitive attitude by LEAs will also encourage more women to evoke the law when facing harassment online.

iii. The government should enact relevant and effective laws for the protection of user data and privacy .

iv. Civil society organisations offer resources that can help deal with harassment, including resources for dealing with mental health issues related to harassment, information and awareness raising about available means of redressal and creation of allied networks that can offer support to victims of harassment.

2. Another issue that was persistently mentioned by participants of the study was misinformation. To tackle this challenge, it is recommended that

i. Internet companies and technology platforms should enact mechanisms through which misinformation, specially misinformation that can trigger any kind of violence, can be reported and dealt with efficiently.

ii. Media and civil society organisations should work to raise awareness about digital disinformation and misinformation and help citizens build their skills in identification of misinformation.

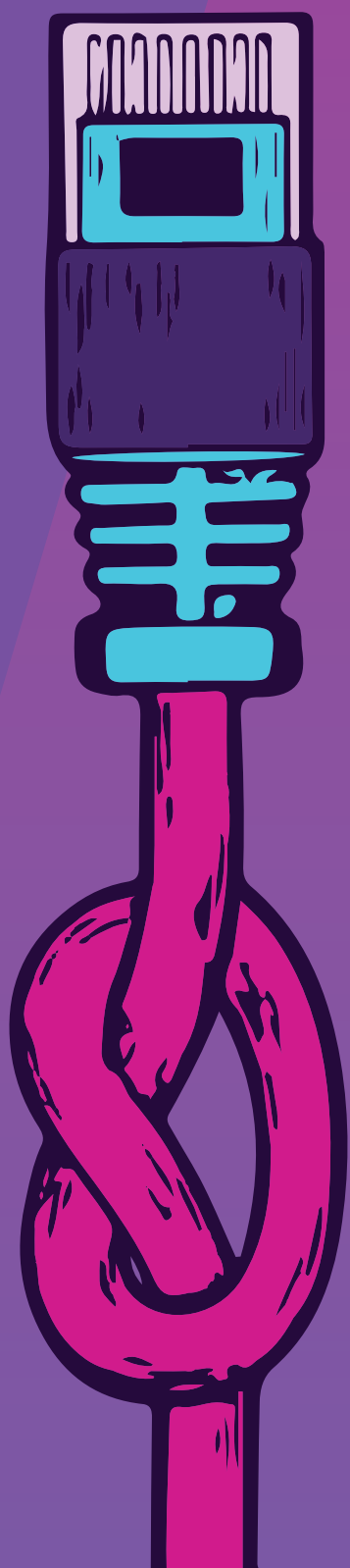
3. The research demonstrates that perceptions about the use and users of the Internet also have an impact on women's access to the Internet. Men with particular perceptions about Internet and Internet users limit access, regulate and monitor women's use of the Internet. To counter these attitudes, it is recommended that

- i. The government and other public institutions should take necessary policy and practical measures, so that women users can experience the Internet in a safer way and women's use is not restricted due to the perceived need for protection from negative elements.
- ii. Both public and private actors should initiate awareness raising campaigns through which negative perceptions about Internet use can be challenged.

4. As mentioned in the research limitations section, this is only an exploratory research conducted with a small sample of Internet users. The findings are reflective of the presence of attitudes that have a direct impact on how women in Pakistan experience the Internet. The need for further research remains. It is recommended that:

- i. Further research is conducted to explore the theme with a nationally representative group of Internet users.
- ii. To understand the attitudes towards Internet in a more comprehensive manner, there is also a need to introduce other variables, such as education, geographical diversity, and age, in the sample as these variables can have an impact on the users' engagement with technology.
- iii. Research should also be conducted to explore the underlying social, economic, and political reasons that may be driving the identified perceptions of the Internet.
- iv. Further research is needed to study the extent of control and regulation of women's access to the Internet by male members of the family, specifically when this control is a direct result of how men view the Internet.

ANNEXURES





Annex 1

Focus Group on Internet Perception

Instructions for the facilitators

SESSION 1

INTRODUCTION & RULES

Duration : 5 minutes

RULES

1. Conversation will be recorded
2. No names & affiliations would be published
3. Mutual respect
4. No wrong answers
5. Speak one by one

SESSION 2

PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTION + ICE BREAKER

Duration: 15 minutes

ICE-BREAKER + INTRO (5 minutes)

Structure - Participants introduce one by one, followed by some summarisation by moderator at the end, including any comments participants might have

Prompt - Please introduce yourself & share what does the Internet mean to you?

SESSION 3

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT THE INTERNET

Duration: 25 minutes

Structure - Working sheets & discussion on identified areas

Use Worksheet 1 to initiate the discussion.

Use collated information from the worksheets to lead discussion, based on the following prompts.

Discussion Prompts -

- Which of these is the most important for you?
- Let's imagine that tomorrow I said you cannot ever connect to the internet again.
- Which of these things that you can do now would you miss the most? Why?
- What wouldn't you miss about the internet? Why?

Summarisation - Moderator Flipchart / Sticky Notes - Make clusters of identified themes that emerged on paper and during the discussion.

SESSION 4
INTERNET AS INFORMATION SOURCE

Duration: 5 minutes

Structure: Grid Worksheet, brief discussion

1. Make grid detailed in Worksheet 2 on the white board.
2. Ask the group to quickly vote on each point, asking them to briefly explain their choice.

SESSION 5
WHAT IS BAD ABOUT THE INTERNET

Duration: 15 minutes

Structure: Open discussion

- Explore the effect on relationships, sense of security and harassment, higher costs, etc. Also explore attitudes about the negative effects of the internet on female users versus male users.

SESSION 6
WHAT TYPE OF PERSON USES THE INTERNET?

Duration: 10 minutes

Structure: Worksheet followed by open discussion

- Using Worksheet 3, ask respondents to list qualities and define characteristics of male and female internet users
- Use descriptors used by participants to tease out any gender specific characterisations

SESSION 7
CHALLENGES

Duration: 10 minutes

Structure

Lead in from the previous section - Are there any issues or challenges that either you or others in your community might face because of using the internet?

Ends.

With the internet you can

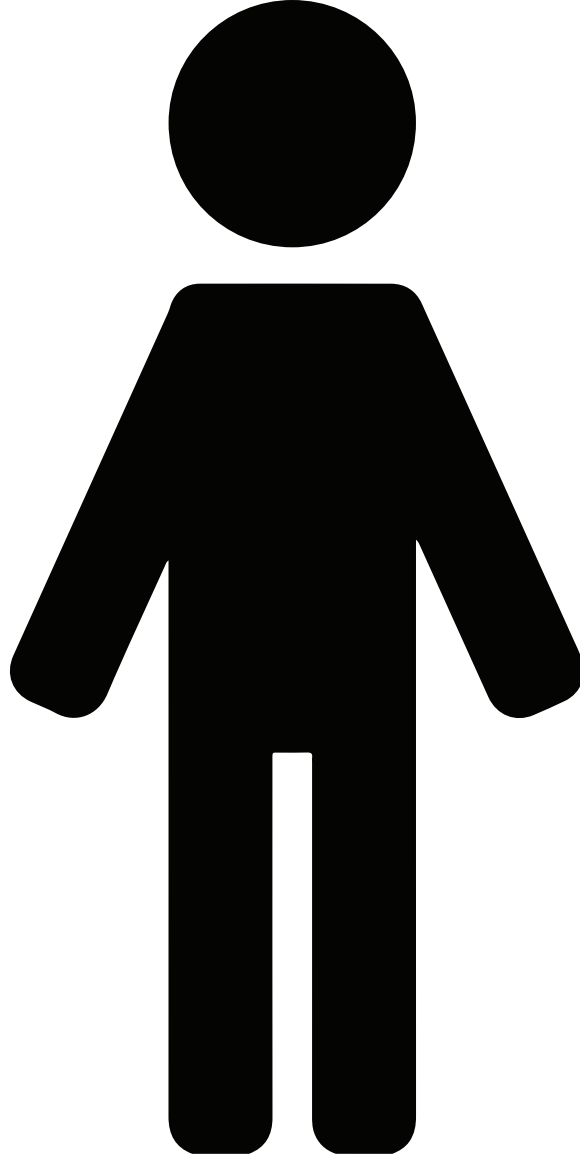
and I like that because

Make the following grid on the whiteboard / flipchart

آپ کے خیال میں ان میں سے کون سا میڈیم معلومات کی رسائی کے لئے بہتر ہے؟				
معلومات کی با آسانی رسائی کے لئے	ٹی وی	انٹرنیٹ	ریڈیو	اخبار
درست اور قابل اعتبار معلومات کی رسائی کے لئے	ٹی وی	انٹرنیٹ	ریڈیو	اخبار
اپنے کام یا پسند کی معلومات کی رسائی کے لئے	ٹی وی	انٹرنیٹ	ریڈیو	اخبار

In your opinion, which is the better medium for information access?				
For easy access to information	TV	Internet	Radio	Newspaper
For access to credible & trustworthy information	TV	Internet	Radio	Newspaper
For access to specific information linked to your interest	TV	Internet	Radio	Newspaper

This is a general male user of the internet. What characteristics do you think he has?
یہ ایک عمومی مرد انٹرنیٹ صارف ہیں۔ آپ کے خیال میں ان کی کیا
خصوصیات ہیں؟



This is a general female user of the internet. What characteristics do you think she has?

یہ ایک عمومی خاتون انٹرنیٹ صارف ہیں۔ آپ کے خیال میں ان کی کیا خصوصیات ہیں؟



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About Media Matters for Democracy

Media Matters for Democracy works to defend the freedom of expression, media, Internet, and communications in Pakistan. The main premise of our work is to push for a truly independent and inclusive media and cyberspace where the citizens in general, and journalists in specific, can exercise their fundamental rights and professional duties safely and without the fear of persecution or physical harm.

We undertake various initiatives including but not limited to training, policy research, advocacy, movement building and strategic litigation to further our organizational goals. We also work on acceptance and integration of digital media and journalism technologies and towards creating sustainable 'media-tech' initiatives in the country.

MMfD recognises diversity and inclusion as a core value of democracy and thus all our programs have a strong focus on fostering values and skills that enable and empower women, minority communities, and other marginalized groups.

<http://mediamatters.pk/>

<http://digitalrightsmonitor.pk/>

<http://pakrtidata.org/>

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