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Digital Arena Empowering Women's Online Presence: A Stratified Survey of Lahore

Abstract

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**Keywords:** Digital Empowerment, Women's Online Presence, Familial Influence, Privacy and Security Concerns, Digital Gender Divide

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### Title

Digital Arena Empowering Women's Online Presence: A Stratified Survey of Lahore

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### Abstract

Digital media has provided women an opportunity to give their point of view and establish their online presence, especially in countries like Pakistan. The purpose this research is to understand the perception of women regarding social media as a source of self-expression and empowerment. Along with this, the familial influence and online privacy and security concerns are also considered. Quantitative approach has been used and data from 384 women belonging to different age groups, educational and professional backgrounds and localities has collected. For the analysis of data, descriptive statistics and one-sample *t*-test has been used. Results have shown that women consider social media as a tool to give their point of view and show their creativity and talent. But familial influence, online harassment and privacy concerns limit their online participation. This research emphasizes that secure digital space less familial influence is important for the actual digital empowerment of women.

**Keywords:** Digital Empowerment, Women's Online Presence, Familial Influence, Privacy and Security Concerns, Digital Gender Divide

### Introduction

In today's era of digital and technological development the use of social media platforms has transformed the world. Today, social media platforms provide spaces for communication, participation and

creating online identity. In the recent decade an accelerated growth has been observed in the use of digital technology and social media for various purposes across the globe. Now a days a considerable number of people are earning through online platforms. E-commerce, digital marketing, online



content creation, blogging and vlogging has created new opportunities for young online earners and digital content creators. Social media platforms have given rise to digital journalism, providing chance of sharing views to common people and opportunity to global citizens of freely giving their opinion on different political and social issues, interacting with people, creating networking and strengthening social relations across the globe.

The advent of digital development opened the doors of success for women. It promoted the concept of online learning and earning. This home-based working mechanism facilitated many home makers for earning their livings. Social media platforms can serve as the potential space for women empowerment by providing women a chance to express their self, voice their views and opinions, build self-identity and display social responsibility. Meanwhile, there are also many challenges and existential crises related to social media usage of women. Some of them include cultural barriers, surveillance and online harassment.

In developing countries Pakistan women have limited access to technology. The report of united nations clearly depicted a significant digital gender divide in Pakistan. Living in a patriarchal society where a large number of girls are deprived of basic rights like seeking education, joining professions of their choices and getting married to the people they want; the idea of free digital access is a far shot. Cultural barriers and family values have an effect on the online participation of women. Women content creators are sometimes not allowed to reveal their faces because of the societal norms. The Social media presence of women, is associate with rebellion behavior and threat to the honor and reputation of male members of the family.

Even if women are provided free digital access, they have to face many challenges online. Some of these challenges include risk of data breaches, online harassment and misuse of personal information. Women are often considered more vulnerable to online risks. These participations can act as a barrier to self-expression and online participation of women.

In developing counties like Pakistan, women are trying hard to get digital access, establish online

presence and express themselves. Lahore is the second largest city of Pakistan with population of approximately 13 million people. Lahore is city of educational excellence and professional development. A significant number of women use social media platforms for various purposes. There is lack of city specific research focusing on the stratified perception of women in terms of online presence as a source of digital empowerment and self-expression. Despite digital development there is a need to know, what women perceive about social media as a source of empowerment and restriction with in familial and privacy context

This study aims to determine women's opinion from different strata regarding their social media usage in relation to their self-expression, does familial influence limit their online participation and to which extent they are concerned about their privacy and security while using social media platforms.

### **Digital Arena and Increased Social Media Usage**

Presently, Digital technology has greatly transformed the human life especially in terms of communication, participation and identity formation. Social media platforms such as twitter, face book, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube have not only brought innovation in the thinking patterns of society rather they have provided people a chance to present their opinion to the masses. A rapid increase in social media usage has been observed in the past few years. Now people not only use social media for entertainment but also for other purposes such as education, business networking and earning (Warnecke, 2017).

Digital arena has created new avenues such as digital marketing, E-commerce, online freelancing content creation blogging and vlogging. Social media has also given rise to digital journalism, where a citizen can present his opinion on social and political topics and can interact globally (Ahmed et.al)

### **Digital Empowerment as A Source of Self-Expression for Women**

Digital development has opened the doors of progress especially for women. The concept of online learning and online earning has given a new dimension to

women empowerment where women can learn and earn from home and can become financially independent. Home based digital work has created a great opportunity for the women who cannot get out to work (Majid & Mustafa, [2022](#))

Social media has provided women with an opportunity to express themselves and establish their online-identities. These platforms have also facilitated women in showcasing their creativity, giving their point of view on social issues and interact with their community. Various studies have revealed that more access to social media can raise the level of self-confidence and responsibility among women (Henshaw, [2023](#); Warnecke, [2017](#)).

### Familial Influence and Patriarchal Constrains

The experience of digital empowerment is not similar for every woman especially in developing countries like Pakistan. Pakistan is a patriarchal society where gender roles, family values and cultural norms greatly influence the behaviors of women. United nations and different research reports have highlighted the digital gender divide in Pakistan where women have limited access to technology and have limited autonomy (Jafri & Rizwan, [2025](#)).

Familial influence plays an important role in the online participation of women. In many houses the social media usage of women is monitored, controlled and restricted. Posting, profile visibility and even opinion sharing is confined to the permission from family. In some cases, women are stopped from sharing their pictures, making videos and giving their personal identity because their online presence is considered as a threat to the honor of members of family (Musofer & Moufer, [2025](#)).

Such hurdles can restrict self-expression and online confidence of women. Due to these challenges they have to suffer self-censorship and they avoid giving their unfiltered opinion openly (Askar & Firdous).

### Self-Expression and Online Identity

Self-expression is the basic aspect of digital empowerment. Social media provide women the opportunity of expressing their thoughts, opinions

interests and creativity. Writing, sharing pictures and videos and taking part in discussions can become a source of establishing online identity for women. Researches have indicated that when women freely participate in on digital platform their psychological well-being is achieved and their self-worth increases (Khaliqi et al., [2024](#)).

But when self-expression is under the influence of family pressure, societal backlash and cultural expectation, the purpose of digital empowerment is not fulfilled. Therefore, it is important to know whether women consider social media as a source of self-empowerment or restriction (Henshaw, [2023](#)).

### Concerns of Privacy and Security

In digital world another important concern for women is the issue of privacy and security. Cyber-bullying, online harassment, misuse of data, screenshots, and the threat of bad reputation greatly effects the digital presence of women. Women are more vulnerable to online harassment as compared to men, due to which they limit their online activities (Michota, [2013](#); Saritepeci et al., [2024](#)).

This fear regarding privacy and security restricts the self-expression of women and limit their digital identity. If not properly addressed, these platforms will become an insecure space instead of the source of empowerment for women (Henshaw, [2023](#)).

### Background of the Study

#### The Concept of Digital Gender Divide

United Nations Organization (UNO) along with digital development has identified the problem of “digital Gender Divide”. According to this concept, women have less access to digital devices such as laptops smartphones and internet, especially in developing countries. This not only limits the online presence and participation of women but also deprive them of advanced and digital education and chance of earning through online platforms.

In times of COVID-19, it was observed that in backward areas of Pakistan women were not even allowed to use smart phone for taking online classes because it was perceived that they will misuse it and

become rebellious. It was observed that online visibility of women was considered as a threat to the honor and dignity of male members of family.

The term of Digital Gender Divide not only indicates less digital access of women but it is a multidimensional phenomenon in which digital literacy, autonomy, safety and socio-cultural factors are also included. This concept served as the background of this research paper.

### Research Gap

In Pakistan, especially in cities like Lahore, the use of social media is increasing rapidly but city specific and stratified research regarding online presence and empowerment of women is very limited. Most of the studies usually focus on rural areas or analyze general national trends. Less attention has been paid to the perception of women from different age groups, educational backgrounds and professions.

The purpose of this research is to understand the perception of women from different strata regarding social media as a source of self-expression and empowerment and does familial influence and privacy and security concerns restricts women's online presence. This research will be good addition in academic literature regarding digital gender-divide, family dynamics and online security and will be beneficial for the policy makers.

### Problem Statement

In today's digital arena, social media platforms have transformed means of communication and have provided women a chance of self-expression and establishing online identity. In developing countries like Pakistan, women have to face many challenges in accessing and utilizing digital platforms. Even in a city like Lahore, family pressure influences the online presence of the women. Privacy and security issues may also act as a barrier in the free digital participation of women. The study aims to explore, the perception of women regarding social media as a source of self-expression and empowerment and to check the effect of familial influence and privacy and security concern on the online presence and digital empowerment of women.

### Research Objectives

1. To assess the perception of women regarding social media as a source of self-expression.
2. To determine to which extent familial influence restrict online participation of women.
3. To measure the level of concern among women regarding digital privacy and security.

### Significance of Study

In today's world social media platforms have become an important part of women's life. These platforms enable women to express their thought and build their own identity. That's why it is important to know that do women perceive social media as an empowering space or a restricting environment for them.

In countries like Pakistan, where social and cultural norms influence the behavior of women, the online participation of women is also affected by multiple factors especially familial influence which may support or restrict their online presence and participation. This study is important so that women can clearly figure out their perceptions and opinions.

Concerns regarding digital privacy and security are also increasing these days. Online harassment, risk of information breaches and risk of bad reputation limit women's online participation. An important part of this study is to measures the: level of privacy and security concern and determine the extent to which its effects their online participation.

This research is being conducted in Lahore, where the use of social media is rapidly increasing, but limited empirical research is available on women's online participation. Therefore, this study will contribute in academic literature and may became a reference point for future researchers.

Practically the findings of this studies can be beneficial for policymakers, educators and media professionals so that they can develop strategies to provide a safe digital space for women. Moreover, this research will be helpful in raising awareness regarding gender and digital media.

## Literature Review

Kamran Zaib et al. (2025) cited that Increased women participation on social media platform has also created high risk of online harassment and offline violence. They argued that in a patriarchal society like Pakistan, there is a gender-based discrimination in exposure to technology. Women often suffer bullying and harassment on digital platforms due to which their privacy and security is at great risk. Freedom of speech and expressions is accompanied by the exploitation of personal freedom and exposure to various forms of violence merging the boundaries of online and offline abuse. They conducted a study across KPK and concluded that women who gave their presence on Tiktok were much likely to suffer online as well as offline harassment and abuse. Their study strongly demanded to put an end to technology facilitated gender-based violence by raising awareness and ensuring legal actions against cyber-crimes and offline violence.

Musofer & Muofer (2025) suggested that patriarchal construction of society is great hindrance in the way of free digital usage and visibility of women across various digital platforms. The study Highlighted the limited digital space available for the women especially in backward and rural areas. This study focused on the opportunities available for women in Gilgit Baltistan and the results clearly suggested that women were deprived of willful digital space. The article highlighted the term “willful digital femininity” bringing into light the cultural barriers, societal norms and family influence preventing women to freely access and utilize digital space. The article further argued that women are not even allowed to share their perceptions and thoughts about feminism, thus limiting the freedom of speech and expression for women in this region. A thought was provoked that women can play their traditional roles equally well while engaging with emerging digital landscape.

Warnecke (2017) exposed that not all the important sources are tangible; access to knowledge and information also contribute to the progress of an individual leading to the development of nations. The author emphasized in developing countries

information and communication technologies (ICT) help cater basic human needs. Some technologies greatly benefit women. They provide women an easy access to knowledge, business opportunities, online earning, online learning and having exposure to digitally facilitated world. Women can connect with other women online and get inspiration from each other. This will create a feeling of harmony among them and bind them together as one unit. Thus, resulting in women empowerment.

Majid &Mustufa (2022) mentioned that the use of digital devices and internet increased rapidly during and after covid-19 pandemic. It created more great opportunity for women to earn through digital platforms but again the gender inequality acted as a barrier. The patriarchal society has unfortunately set some fixed roles for both genders to follow and it seems very difficult to bypass the societal norms. The argument was further established by conducting a study across 250 women with different socio-economic status, educational and professional backgrounds. The results suggested that digital tools can financially empower women and lead them towards self-independence. The article recommended the collaboration between government and private entities for providing digital devices and internet access to women along with raising awareness about digital literacy, data privacy and online security.

Another article written by (Majid & Mustufa, 2022) highlighted the impact of the digital technology on women empowerment. A study was conducted by arranging in-depth interviews of women with low literacy and low economic class. The results concluded that; women who directly or indirectly work for some formal firms, without having proper legal contract can be termed as non-formal workers, women who work from home, own their business and produce goods and services and earn accordingly can be termed as home-based workers and women who work with in the premises of an organization without any legal contract with limited wages can be termed as domestic workers. The article emphasized that digital technology can directly affect the socio-economic status of women.

Jafri & Rizwan (2025) stated that there are two diverse narratives in term of women identity and public space in Pakistan. Traditionalists and religiously charged figures negate social and political engagement of women while feminists and activist of "Aurat March" support it. The study reveals that feminist activist, women right NGO's and foreign policy makers of women rights view religious patriarchy as existential threat to women independence. They demand for equal rights, dowry, marriage and public participation. While traditionalist view as the exploitation of their cultural, moral and religious values.

Askar & Firdous (2021) reported that women in countries like Pakistan have opportunities of online learning, digital marketing and participation in social and political activities but these opportunities are limited by the male dominant society. The interview of seven professionally strong educated women reveals that women from every socio-economic-strata faced challenges in free utilization of social media platform. They demonstrated that the marginalized opportunities are affecting psychological well-being of women, thus creating a feeling of complex, fear and sometimes hatred among the women.

Khaliqi et al. (2024) evaluated gender disparities in education by examining the role of online learning platforms and their impact on woman empowerment. The study focused on conducting in-dept interviews of students, educationist and stake holders involved. The results show that online learning provide great learning opportunity for women and directly contributed to women empowerment.

Michota (2013) reported that women who perform online business showed a high concern regarding the privacy breaches and online harassment. The study questions the cyber security for women. The research further argues that the fear of digital technology is more deeply interlinked with gender-social vulnerabilities of women. While analyzing the study the author demands the cyber security measures and social interventions to provide safe digital space for women.

Henshaw (2023) addressed the insecurity faced by women in term of utilizing technology for their well-

being and independence is being compromised due to the fear of security and deprivation of free digital usage rights. Henshaw (2023) further argued that if these security concerns are not properly addressed and resolved they may lead to limit the excellence of women digital domain. Due to multiple factors including; avoiding online participation, self-sensor, fear of back clash and societal pressure, women limit the utilization of digital tools which effect their personal as well as professional growth. The researches recommended culturally sensitive digital literacy programs for ensuring its affective utilization.

Ahmed et al. (2025) highlighted the importance of digital tools in the financial growth of women. The researcher emphasized that Digital tools have transformative effects for entrepreneurship led by women. The study elaborated that e-commerce has become the tool for women to gain economic stability. The author recommends that for the professional growth of women gender bias and family restrictions must be addressed in order to gain meaningful empowerment.

Warnecke (2017) highlighted that the mentorship and peer's network to women, can be provided by ICT devices. These ICT devices contribute in creating social innovation. These, advancement provide greater opportunities; for gaining knowledge and reducing isolation. This also helps in creating supportive digital communities that economically and socially empower women. The study links the importance of integrating technology with human-centered approach.

Concerns of privacy and security are closely interlinked with gender barriers. Women hesitate to share their personal information online due to the fear of being harassed, exploitation and identity theft (Michota, 2013; Saritepeci et al., 2024). Widely used platforms do not provide sufficient privacy policies, giving raise to vulnerabilities making women feel unsafe in digital interactions. Digital divide addressed by international platforms indicated that while designing policies security concerns are often neglected. Infrastructure and access are overemphasized while fail to navigate the online risk and lived experience of women online.

There is need to acquire holistic approach that incorporate security awareness, skill development, access and socio-cultural considerations in digital empowerment programs. Verification from India, Pakistan and other developing countries illustrated interventions of ICT devices interlinked with network building opportunities and mentorships can greatly benefit women entrepreneurs. (Warnecke, 2017; Ahmed et al., 2025).

The literature collectively underscores the need for policies that are both gender-responsive and contextually aware. E-governance, digital entrepreneurship support schemes, and educational programs must account for the security, privacy, and literacy challenges uniquely affecting women (Michota, 2013; Saritepeci et al., 2024; Ahmed et al., 2025). Without such tailored interventions, digitalization risks replicating or exacerbating existing social inequalities, leaving women at a structural disadvantage despite technological progress (Henshaw, 2023; Warnecke, 2017). Researchers further advocate for participatory approaches that involve women in the design of digital tools and policy frameworks, ensuring that their voices inform the creation of safe, inclusive, and empowering digital spaces (Singh et al., 2025; Ahmed et al., 2025).

The body of research indicate that digital visibility of women may provide remarkable opportunities for economic stability and empowerment of women and security barriers ensure maximum participation. Digital gender divide can be addressed through policies addressing safety, access and literacy. As per empirical studies from multiple regions; educational access, entrepreneurial opportunities and social networks when designed inclusively lead to professional growth in digital world. Intersectional dimensions and sector-specific outcomes should be explored by future researches (Michota, 2013; Saritepeci et al., 2024; Henshaw, 2023; Ahmed et al., 2025; Warnecke, 2017; Singh et al., 2025). The insight Foundation for both policymakers and practitioners to develop sustainable interventions that enable women to harness the full potential of the digital economy can be derived from the insight of the literature review.

## Theoretical Framework:

### Uses and Gratification Theory

Uses and Gratification theory states that the audience is not passive, people use media to gratify their own needs, to showcase their interest, motivation and talent. According to this theory, every individual chooses media to fulfil its own needs; to get information, entertainment, social interaction, to build personal identity and to express emotions. The use of media is under the control of individuals and they themselves decide that which media platform they will use and for what purpose. In the contemporary era of digital development this theory becomes more relevant because social media platforms provide multiple options of creating, consuming and sharing content, online.

In the context of this research Uses and Gratification theory helps to understand the social media usage of women. Women use social media for various purposes such as; expressing their thoughts and opinions, establishing their online identity, showcasing their creativity and strengthening their social relations. In city like Lahore, where women belong to different socio-economic groups and different educational backgrounds, their social media usage is also different. Some women consider it a source of self-expression while for others it is just a source of communication and entertainment. This theory, provides the basis that do women perceive social media as empowering source to fulfil their needs or not. Uses and Gratification Theory provides a strong base for this study which explain the relation between perception of women and social media usage.

### Privacy Calculus Theory

Privacy Calculus theory emphasizes that whenever a person shares his personal information online, he calculates benefits and risks in his brain. According to this theory, people give importance to their privacy but if they consider that sharing content on a platform can be greatly beneficial for them, they take risk of sharing, putting their privacy concerns a side. Individuals, evaluate that what they will get and what they might face such as online harassment, misuse of

data and identity theft. Digital platforms have created many opportunities but have also raised the risk of privacy and security concerns.

In this research Privacy Calculus theory is much relevant in understanding social media usage behavior of women. In countries like Pakistan, where social and cultural restrictions are imposed on women the concerns of online privacy become more intense. Women often limit their online participation due to the fear of misuse of personal information or online harassment. In the context of this research, this study explains that women balance benefits gained by social media such as self-expression and social visibility with risks of privacy and security. This risk-balance analysis, directly influence their social media presence. This theory helps to understand that to which extent privacy and security concerns influence women's online presence and participation

### Research Questions

Q-1 Is there a significant perception among women regarding social media as a source of self-expression?

Q-2 Does familial influence significantly restrict the online presence of women?

Q-3 Do women show a high level of concern regarding privacy and security issues while using social media?

### Hypothesis

H1<sub>a</sub> There is a significant perception among women regarding social media as a source of self-expression.

H2<sub>a</sub> Familial influence significantly restrict online participation of women

H3<sub>a</sub> Women show a high level of concern regarding privacy and security issues while using social media platforms

### Methodology

For this research, quantitative research technique was adopted. Survey method was used for data collection, in which patterns and relationships were identified through numerical analysis.

For population sample, target group was Lahore based women. For sampling stratified random sampling technique was utilized in which women were divided into strata based on their age, education and occupation. Sample size was 384 respondents which was feasible and manageable.

A structured questionnaire was designed as a data collection tool. Likert scale (1-5) (where 1= strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree) was used to measure women's perception regarding familial influence and privacy concern. Demographic questions such as age, education, occupation and social media use were included.

Variables were divided into two categories.

### Dependent Variables

- perception of self-expression through social media
- level of online presence
- privacy and security concerns.

### Independent Variables

- Social media usage
- familial influence

Data collection Procedure: The questionnaire was circulated in soft form (google forms). Respondents were assured about the confidentiality and anonymity of their data. Data was be collected in approximately 4 weeks.

Data analysis: For data analysis descriptive statistics such as mean, median, standard deviation and frequencies were used. To test hypothesis one-sample T-test was applied. Results were presented through graphs and tables.

As per ethical consideration, informed consent was taken from the participants that data will be used only for the purpose of academic research and anonymity and privacy of data will be maintained.

### Data Analysis

H1 There is a significant perception among women regarding social media as a source of self-expression.

Table 1

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Perception regarding Self-expression	366	17.1366	4.13179	.21597

Table 2

One-Sample Test						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Test Value = 3	
					Lower	Upper
Perception regarding Self-expression	65.456	365	.000	14.13661	13.7119	14.5613

**One Sample t-test=65.456**

**P-value= 0.00**

In this hypothesis it was assumed that women perceive social media as a source of self-expression for them. To test hypothesis, one sample t-test was used. As per results mean score was found more than the test value and p-value was less than 0.05 which shows strong statistical significance.

This means that women perceive social media as an important source to express themselves and share their thoughts and experiences. Respondents have perceived that social media provide them a chance to establish their personal identity, raise their voice on various social issues, showcase their talent and give their point of view. As per results null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted. The results verify that social media is a meaningful and effective platform of self-expression for women.

Table 3

H2 Familial influence significantly restrict online participation of women				
One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Familial influence	368	16.2038	5.46620	.28495

Table 4

One-Sample Test						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Test Value = 3	
					Lower	Upper
Familial influence	46.338	367	.000	13.20380	12.6435	13.7641

**One Sample t-test= 46.338**

**P-value= 0.00**

The purpose of H2a was to find out whether familial influence significantly restrict the online presence of women or not. To test hypothesis, one sample t-test

was used. As per results mean score was found more than the test value and p-value was less than 0.05 which shows strong statistical significance.

As per results, family expectations, monitoring and approval significantly restrict the online presence

of women. Respondents have reported they limit their posting due to the reaction of their family. Due to similar reason, they avoid giving their personal identity on social media. The result demonstrates that familial influence can act as barrier in social media participation of the women. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis H2 is accepted and null hypothesis is

rejected. These finding reflect the patriarchal structure of society where the control of family extends to the digital spaces as well.

H3 Women show a high level of concern regarding privacy and security issues while using social media platforms.

**Table 5**

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Concerns of privacy and security	371	17.4798	5.15086	.26742

**Table 6**

One-Sample Test						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Test Value = 3		
				Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Perception regarding Self-expression	54.146	370	.000	14.47978	13.9539 15.0056	

**One Sample t-test= 54.146**

**P-value= 0.00**

In H3a its was inquired that do women show a high level of concern regarding privacy and security issues while using social media. To test hypothesis, one sample t-test was used. The mean difference of 14.47678 was more than test value and p-value less than 0.05, which shows strong statistical significance.

The results indicate that the women are concerned about misuse of their personal information, online harassment and bad reputation. They fear restricts them from freely posting and actively participating on social media platforms. Thus, alternate hypothesis H3a is accepted and null hypothesis is rejected. The findings reveal that privacy and security concerns directly influence the digital empowerment of women and limit their online visibility.

**Discussion and Analysis**

The research paper has explored that to which extent digital arena especially social media platforms has

empowered women living in Lahore. The study focused on that how women perceive social media as a source of empowerment and how far familial influence and concerns of privacy and security restrict their online presence and participation. The findings of the study reveal that digital media is a powerful tool for women but this empowerment is incomplete and restricted.

Results have displayed, that women consider social media as an important source of self-expression. Majority respondents agreed that social media has provided them with an opportunity to give their point of view and showcase their creativity and interest. These findings support uses and gratification theory, according to which individuals use social media to gratify their own needs and desires. In city like Lahore, where digital access and educational exposure is relatively high; social media becomes an important source of establishing identity, raising voice on social issues and interacting with the masses. This highlights that these platforms can become a source psychological and social empowerment of women.

But the other important findings of this study indicate that familial influence restrict online participation of women. Due to monitoring, expectations and approval of family women limit their online activities and avoid giving their online presence. These results reflect the patriarchal structure of Pakistani society where the control of family is not only limited to physical but also on digital spaces. This situation leads women towards self-censorship which is contradictory to the concept of digital empowerment. The research points out that only digital access is not sufficient, addressing socio-cultural barriers is equally important.

The third important point of this research is the concern regarding privacy and security. Findings demonstrate that women limit their online participation due to the fear of misuse of personal information, online harassment and bad reputation. According to Privacy Calculus Theory individuals calculate the risk factor and benefits before posting. As per this study, if risk factor dominates women their online presence and participation. This fear limits digital empowerment and makes social media an insecure space.

During the process of data collection one on one interaction with women highlight some important factors. Women below 18 years of age mostly school and college students were more interested in posting content online. However, they were also facing most familial influence which restricted their online participation. These age strata, is also more vulnerable to harassment and privacy issues. Women between the age of 19-25; if educated or working were less influenced by family pressure and were comparatively less concerned about privacy and security. Homemakers of this age with education up to intermediate don't even want to give online presence, because they were immune to familial pressure and they were of the that if they will not post personal information they will be no fear of harassment and data breaches. Women between 26-35 years of age; educated and working class were not much restricted by family pressure and privacy concern while homemakers and less educated women of this age were not much interested in posting. They were okay

with keeping their real identities hidden and watching content without giving online presence. Women above 36 years, were least influenced by family pressure they were not even afraid of privacy and security issues due to the age factor. Educated women of this strata were autonomous and were free to give social media presence however home makers were not much interested in giving online presence.

Collectively, this research demonstrates that social media holds dual nature for women. At one side it provides opportunities of empowerment, self-expression and establishing online identity and on other side familial influence and privacy concerns restrict this potential. These findings relate to the previous studies as well where it was highlighted that patriarchal norms and online insecurity limit digital visibility of women (Michota, 2013; Henshaw, 2023; Musofer & Muofer, 2025). The results of this study emphasize that digital empowerment will be meaningful when safe, supported and culturally sensitive digital environment will be created for women.

## Conclusion

The central point of this research was that how Lahore based woman use social media as tool of self-expression and social participation and which social and digital challenges effect their online presence.

The findings of study, has clearly demonstrated that social media is not only a communication tool for women but is a space where they can express their thoughts and opinions and construct personal identity. Majority respondents accepted social media as a platform to raise voice, give point of view and show creativity and talent.

Whereas, the results also highlight that this digital empowerment is not completely available. Family monitoring and expectations largely shape the online behaviors of women. Many women restrict their online posting and limit their digital identity due to the reaction of Family. The findings point towards the gender-based control moving from offline to online world.

Along with this, privacy and security concerns have proved to be a big hurdle in the of women's

digital empowerment. Fear on only harassment, misuse of personal and bad reputation limit free-expression. The study concludes, until digital spaces are made more protected and supported spaces for women, the complete potential of empowerment provided by social media cannot be realized.

### **Future Recommendations**

For future researches, it is important to add women from different ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds and probability sampling technique should be used to make findings more representative. Comparison of different provinces and rural urban context can be beneficial.

Other than this, qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions should be added to understand the lived experiences, digital fears and coping strategies of women. Longitudinal studies can also be conducted, which analyze the effects of social media from time to time.

At practical level, it is important to promote digital literacy and cyber safety awareness program, especially for women. Educational institutions, policy makers and social media platforms should work together to develop mechanism that effectively address online harassment. In this way, strong privacy protection and reporting system can help in creating more inclusive and empowering digital environment.

### **Limitations**

There are a few methodological and contextual limitations of this study. The first limitation is related to the selection of sample. Due to the convenience sampling technique the selection of respondents was not random. Which can affect the generalization of results.

The basic population sample of 384 respondents was complete but not more responses were collected.

The other important limitation is geographical scope. This study was limited to Lahore only, experience of women living in different cities and belonging to different socio-cultural backgrounds may differ from the experience of Lahore based women.

This study was conducted in a limited time frame. Moreover, the tool of data collection was a self-supported questionnaire, where the answers were based on the personal perceptions of the respondents.

To collect data 5 points Likert scale was used which might be insufficient to quantify the complexity of the behaviors of respondents towards social media as a source of empowerment. The subtle view demonstrates that experiences could not have been captured using close ended questionnaire. There, remains a risk of exaggeration and under-reporting in such data. Due to the use of Likert scale, the understanding of deep-rooted and personal digital experience is limited.

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