EFFECTS OF WOMEN'S VIOLENCE BASED CONTENT OF FACEBOOK: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF BELIEFS AND PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN

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ABSTRACT
Social media are interactive technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression, and Facebook is the most frequently used platform in the branches of social media. Facebook imparts liberty to post any sort of content and escalating violence-based contents to be a controversy today. It has changed the patterns of viewing as the effects of violent-based content have become a dispute. The purpose of the study is how Facebook is building a perception of women about violence-based content and the real world. A qualitative research methodology is opted to study the issue. Focus group discussions as a research method are in this study. The research has adopted a purposive sampling technique. Five focus groups consisting of 6 members each were conducted. This research has focused on the beliefs and perceptions regarding the effects of women's violence-based content on social media. The study concludes that violent-based content is creating fear, mistrust, insecurity, and distress among women. The results are related to being identical to the cultivation theory as social media has been used by people to spread violence and negativity without any authenticity.
Keywords: Violence based content, Facebook, Beliefs, Perceptions of women.

INTRODUCTION
The development of social media, and Web 2.0 more broadly, has revolutionized all aspects of our social, cultural, and political lives. Social media provides advantages to its users by not just being a way of entertainment but its recent use as a social watchdog has added a new diminution to its existence. It is providing a platform for discussions and debates in which the participants can share their thoughts from the comfort of their homes and with innumerable people simultaneously. Social media is different from earlier media in its ever-centralizing mass production of a coherent set of images and messages produced for large and diverse populations and in its relatively non-selective, use by most viewers (Madaiah et al., 2016 & Bayraktar, 2007). The advent of the internet has completely altered communication paradigms. It has changed the perceptions about social realities. People spend a lot of time on the internet and see the real world through the lens of the internet. In the years 2020 and 2021, many new developments and significant changes have been observed in the whole world due to COVID-19.

The most popular social media platform is Facebook, which is used by over two billion people each month. This indicates that approximately 36.9% of people on the planet use Facebook (Lua, 2022).
Violence against women is deeply inscribed in social structure. Cultivation theory is constructing and interpreting our behavior, perceptions, and thinking about the social/real world. "The cultivation has always been concerned with the broad underlying elements of content" (Morgan et al, 2015). According to Morgan et. al, (2015), in this fastest-paced world, everyone has a short time, so the importance and advantage of this feature of social media content cannot be denied. Past researchers focused on TV, games, and other

mediums, etc. but studies on social media are emerging. Considering the widespread use of Facebook by women, the number of interpersonal evaluations and comparisons available on social networks is endless and due to its uniqueness, this research has selected Facebook for analyzing women's perceptions of violence-based content on Facebook. This is a contributory study regarding cultivation Theory, because before this as mentioned earlier, this theory had been applied in various research methods including surveys and content analysis. The study highlighted violence in society and showed fear, mistrust, and insecurities that correlate with cultivation theory.

Women in Pakistan are not given complete opportunities to obtain an education and are being victimized by men. Moreover, the rapid increase in violent cases like the Khadija Akbar Case from Faisalabad (August, 16, 2022, Noor Mukadam case (2021), Minar-e-Pakistan case, Motorway-II case (2021), and many others and the projection of these violent cases on social media is reason to study the issue. The particular study aims to understand how Social Media usage is affecting women's perceptions and beliefs regarding the world. The study addresses the following questions…

RQ: 1. Does the exposure to women's violence-based content on Facebook influence the perceptions and beliefs of women about the world?

RQ: 2. Does exposure to women's violence-based content on Facebook influence the beliefs and perceptions of women regarding fear, mistrust, and insecurity?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Facebook and Women's Violence

The most important and frequently used branch of social media is Facebook which was a part of Social Networks where people come together, unite and form new communities. Facebook users are active over the internet. It is network started in 2004 and raised very fast (Calisri, 2015 cited Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calver, 2009; Social Media, 2015:31). Violence on Facebook is emerging. Violence against women that is mediated by technology is increasingly becoming part of women's experience of violence and their online interactions. Majority of the women in the world and Pakistan has access to the internet and use different gadgets. Mainly, Facebook is one of the most useful sites where women post, upload, and share their opinion. As per Omnicore (2020) 54 percent of females are Facebook users while males are 46 percent, and overall women internet users are 83 percent in the world. As per the 2017 Census Report of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, women are 48.8 percent of the population, who excessively use social media and watch violent content on Facebook as a result, and they also experience domestic violence, physical abuse, bullying, and harassment in their daily life.

The plight of the weaker sections of society especially women has gone unheard for longer than it should have and is now being heard on social media, especially on Facebook. Little sounds and contributions about their concerns and rights are getting together and creating an uproar that is resounding in the whole world as it was done for Khadija Akbar, the Noor Mukaddam case, and the Motorway-II case. The significance of this media is evident from the fact that all the conventional media have also opened their portals to it. Social media is empowering people in general and women in particular for their basic human rights on the one hand and sensitizing the youth about relevant issues and urging them toward activism.

It is also observed that during Covid-19, many young women and girls faced many harassment issues by their partners. They were at high risk of experiencing violence from their loved ones. Globally, almost 30 percent of women experienced physical and sexual violence from their partners, and 18 percent have experienced this in the last year. At an extreme level, violence is observed against women at a global level, and 137 women and every sixth woman are murdered by their partners or family members by every three days (Broom. 2020). This issue is becoming a "global pandemic of femicide" somehow not highlighted due to Covid. As doors closed and isolation began, reports of all forms of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, began to rise. The pandemic of violence against women is not new. Even before COVID-19 hit us, globally, 243 million women and girls were abused by their intimate partners in the past years. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified the violence, even as support services faltered and accessing help became harder (BBC News, 2020). Until today, many studies about this issue have been executed to study violence. Notably,

social media and online platforms have opened up space for resisting violence. Social media spaces can function as a counter-public or countercultural forum in which victim-survivors can give voice to their experiences in their own words. Social media is a space of resistance and contestation most recently evidenced by the #MeToo global phenomenon, which was preceded by a string of digital activist efforts such as SlutWalk, Hollaback, #WhyIStayed, Equality Now, International Alliance of Women, and #EndRapeCulture**.**

Women Violence in Pakistan

Violence is a situation obliging an unwanted situation to be done by force and pressure. It is a phenomenon unwanted and unaccepted by society and human being who was the tiniest member of society (Calisir, 2015). In light of the above definitions, violence means financial, spiritual, physical, psychological, and emotional harm that can jeopardize someone's health. (Calisir, 2015 and Ayan, 2006 as cited in Michaud,1991 & Calisir, 2015).

Violence in Pakistan starts in the streets. Before the invention of social media, women did not speak out about violence but now the environment has changed and women are speaking up. The Noor Mukaddam case, Motorway-II Rape Case, and Minar-e-Pakistan case are big examples. The posts related to these incidents have been widely shared on social media, resulting in an infuriated response from every ordinary citizen especially women. Research shows that there is a 200 percent increase in violence cases against women in Pakistan during COVID-19. The result shows that all kinds of violence, murder cases, crime issues, kidnapping, and social problems directly target children and women. This is also observed that many cases were not reported in backward areas of Pakistan (Qureshi, 2020). Almost during Covid-19, a total of 2297 cases of women violence were registered in 25 districts of Pakistan. Violence against women before and during Covid-19 gave momentum to the 'MeToo movement" and "Aurat March" in Pakistan. The voices raised about Mukhtar Mai's case in 2002 made international headlines when she decided to take legal action against the men who had gang-raped her on the orders of a village council. Similarly, the reaction to the above-mentioned cases has seen the rise of more vocal and social media.

"Now we have women who are expressing themselves on social media and going on mainstream media and it has shaped our discourse (Saeed, 2021). These incidents shared on social media especially Facebook and Twitter urged us to understand how Facebook is influencing and cultivating users' perceptions and beliefs about the world around them.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative approach using Focus Group as a research method has been opted to study the issue. The purpose of group discussion is to gain insight into the personal experiences, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and feelings that motivate behavior" (Frith, 2000: 276; Winslow et al. 2002: 566; Merton, 1987; Frith, 2000; Kidd & Parshall, 2000: 295; Bernard, 1995; Broom; Dozier, 1990: 147; Calder, 1977; Folch-Lyon & Trost, 1981; Blackburn Stokes, 2000; Buttner, 2001; Wang, 1997; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996; & Hansen et al., 1998. The professional female Facebook users of Lahore, Pakistan are the targeted *population* in this study. Five focus groups of six respondents have conducted that comprised a *sample size* of 30 participants. The data has been collected through a structured and open-ended cue sheet. *Personal information* of the professional women attending the focus groups is presented in Table 1.

Inclusion Criteria

According to the information presented in Table 1, professional women aged between 26 to 40 attended the focus group discussions. This focus group was conducted in Lahore and all the participants were from Lahore. Before starting the focus group discussion, the moderator explained to the participants the aim of the study. In this study, the participants were from different professions and have been given some codes, described in Table:1.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Facebook posts/content influencing women's beliefs

"...More and more realistic presentation of violence against women on Facebook makes them see themselves as victims in a male dominating society. They see no positive side of society concerning its attitude to women." (A, B2, 33)

"In my opinion, social media particularly Facebook is powerful enough to influence attitudes, beliefs, norms, and values of the world. Facebook's violence-related posts affect people in two ways. One is that violence is happening to women around the globe and the Other is that they learn how to raise their voices against it and they get to know the ways to prevent it."(E, L3, 27)

"Violence-related Posts about women on Facebook influence their beliefs and make them depressed, Posts are persuasive and glamorize violence in such a way that women start feeling like marital life is full of stress and if they are single, they tend to feel like being a bachelor is a blessing. But, this is one side of the coin. These violence-related posts are also a source of awareness and information for women."(C, E4, 35)

Code	Profession	Total Participants	Age Range
A	Bankers	06	28-36
B	Journalists	06	26-35
C	Educationists	06	28-38
D	Businesswomen	06	30-40
E	Lawyers	06	26-35
Total		30	

According to the answers given by the participants, social media's assistance, undoubtedly, in spreading awareness has become the most controversial question today, whether it is helping the people with its mission to spread awareness and knowledge or just distressing them. The unwanted content without authenticity accompanies depression, anxiety, and most importantly pessimism. The adverse effect of Facebook's violent-based content emerges in the form of insecurity and fright in society, especially among women. Even if the posts/content contains reality in it, it compels women to restrict themselves which would be counted as self-defense. The persuasion of violent-based content makes them believe what they see on social media which brings changes in their beliefs. This viewpoint of a participant manifests the affirmation that Facebook's content is steadily influencing the beliefs and perceptions of women and making them see the world as the scariest place to reside. We can sense Facebook as powerful enough to influence the beliefs of women to result in negativity. Previous studies have also shown that the media acts as a powerful tool to capture the attention of the audience, promoting a variety of beliefs and cultural values. (Dave (1980).

The posts compel the female viewers to assume themselves as victims of society in patriarchal society who are not given a better place to live where there is no respect for them. The content turns their minds into a well of insecurities which consequently chokes their mental peace. The world outside or inside the home comes across as an unguarded and unprotected spot, full of vampires around. Not only this, the change can be seen in society as well, as we find examples of men bringing parallel violence in society which they see on Facebook. They put on the content physical clothing; since they take new ideas of

spreading violence whether on roads or in their houses. A quick look at the statistics tells the whole story: men commit more violence than women. The US Department of Justice sponsored the National Crime Victimization Study in 2007. The review found that 75.6 percent of all offenders were male and only 20.1 percent were female (Kohm, 2012). However, the expanding violence in society affects women's mental health to a large extent. Furthermore one of the participants' answers grants the discussion a positive tint. Another answer depicts the positive side of Facebook as well which succors to prove Facebook as a platform to share awareness of the legal and religious rights of women. Without these posts containing information, women would not know about their legal rights and how to raise voices against exceeding violence in society.

Facebook content affects women's lives

> *"...Violence shown on Facebook is directly affecting the mental health of women that results in binging huge changes in their lives. Women start believing that the world is a very dangerous place and that the people around them are there just to harm them."(D, BW1,36)*

> *"Yes, in my opinion, violence-related posts about women on Facebook influence their lives because as we know that media has the power to influence individual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Social norms that influence and encourage gender violence have been targeted by policy interventions using mass media communication."(B, J2, 26)*

Facebook has positive and negative effects on the people who are operating it. The effects can be psychological, mental, physical, and economic; all the effects are condemned yet the one which is affecting mental health and causing, mental illness, physical health, and especially their ability to participate in various activities of daily living (Ngcuka,2020). As some of our participants utter their views like: *"Facebook content affecting the women by lowering their confidence, shattering their mental peace, they feel insecure in public" (A, B5, 27).*

It evinced the negative effects of Facebook's violent-based content on the fragile minds of women who begin to feel insecure outside and inside the house. They perceive difficulties in traveling, making new friends, and talking to strangers, even if someone calls for help from them they tend to feel an extreme fear of the probable consequences. The fear of cannibalizing their souls and bodies restricts them to themselves and to remain at home. The consequence of this fright is usually disclosed to women by not entering into the practical field. For instance, the video about the girl who was kidnapped by some people in front of her office resulted in fear in the women and that fear keeps them in prison at some corner of their houses. The manipulation of Facebook's violent-based content starts right when women proceed to see the outside world into their world which typically causes depression.

Then there comes physical violence; the first and foremost effect of Facebook containing violent-based content strikes the safety of women. As we know the persuasion extent of social media, has become the fastest source of spreading news which has both positive and negative influences on the viewers. The adverse outcome of violent-based content is that it stimulates men to behave brutally towards women, especially towards their wives. The men get to acquire new notions of violence through the content on Facebook. Moreover, economical violence is favorably being heeded by spouses to a large extent.

Kinds of violence faced by women

> *"...Violence locks women into poverty. It limits women's choices; their ability to access education, earn a living and participate in political and public life; poverty exposes them to further violence... Facebook becomes a major reason to spread all these negativities all over the world" (E, L4, 33).*

> *"Women in Pakistan are subordinated in a patriarchal society. The obstacles and oppression have been faced by them in every walk of life" (B, J6, 35)*

> *"It refers to all physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and psychological acts or threats of acts that have an impact on another person. This is one of the most widespread types of violence against women in the world" (D, BW1, 39)*

According to the answers given by the respondents, women are the only species who have been wrangling for their rights and respect for centuries. Every woman fights this battle from her childhood till her death but in return every time they have been answered with violence. A variety of acts of violence are being endured by women whether they are prisoned in the four walls of their houses or they are outside to

earn their living. Social media exhibits real-life incidents as precedents to the public by adding some spices to it which is inevitably accepted by society, especially women. According to the answers of the participants of the focus group, merely psychological, sexual, physical, or economic violence is assumed as unethical whereas there are numerous sorts of violence that whom no-one can ever dare even to suppose as another kind of violence. According to the 2017 census report of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, women constitute 48.8 percent of the population, who use a lot of SM and view violent content on Facebook and consequently experience domestic violence, physical abuse, harassment on the streets and at the workplace and bullying on daily basis.

When it comes to their marriages, our social media is filled with the news of forced marriage whether it can be by family or the men. Then the real violence begins where in-laws act to be their lords. One of the participants accused Facebook as the main factor in spreading violence in society. She said that fraud, cheating cyberbullying, trolling, false promises, nasty comments, social pressures, and reputational threats can come in the category of online violence which women face through Facebook. Generally, we attain posts/content containing pressure against abducted women whose criminals share naked pictures/videos with the public to humiliate the respect of women. The most common problems faced by the majority were around 60% experiencing abuse and abusive language while 41% experienced embarrassment and 39% of respondents claimed they were at risk of sexual violence. In general, 39% of respondents experienced harassment on Facebook, 23% on Instagram, 14% on WhatsApp, 10% on Snapchat, 9% on Twitter, and only 6% on TikTok. Additionally, 19 percent of respondents claimed to have been bullied online and never used their social media, while 12 percent changed their approach to using online media. Furthermore, 44% of all girls and women claimed that social media needs more protection or something to do to be safer (Posetti, et. al. 2020).

In nutshell, women's worth was already in question, however, social media has made it worst. They were being disrespected in their graves after death which substantiates them as the most unsafe creature on earth. Customarily, people prefer not to see these kinds of content as it makes them depressed which is the only simplest way to escape from reality rather than modify it.

Violent-based content creates feelings of fear, mistrust, and insecurity

"Facebook shares negative violent content about women publicly and creates an environment of mistrust and insecurity."(B, J3, 33).

"Posts related to incidents like Motorway-II Case and Noor Mukadam Case etc have a very negative impact on the mental health of women and these kinds of posts also create fear among them."(D, BW5, 30)

"Whenever women see the violence-related post they relate the victim with themselves if they had been countered with such violence in the past or they are afraid of the situation if they have to face it in the future."(C, E6, 32)

As we have been discussing the effects and influences of Facebook's violent-based content, we came across the denouement of declaring fear and fright in women after watching violence on Facebook. The trace of fear is interlinked with being a woman, as we are told by our ancestors about the first duel of the world is due to a woman. The fear of being violated by men or society resides in the body of a woman; even that body of a female child brings fear, insecurities, and threats along with her. Many unfortunate female children have been violated either by their parents who produce children out of wedlock or by Pedophiles. Being a woman is a fear which is quite natural, so if a woman beholds violent-based content it increases the already existence of fear in women. According to Gerbner and Gross (1976), (1976), fear is a universal emotion that can be exploited by television or other media materials that promote exaggerated perceptions of danger in the real world and women's feelings of insecurity and vulnerability. Increases fear which leads them to demand protection from authorities and use of force.

All the participants expressed a similar opinion that it creates fear not only in women but almost in every human; because a male viewer can also be a brother, father, or husband who starts thinking to protect his women more than before. As to discuss the effect of fear on women, a participant shares her viewpoints in these words: As we have discussed in previous questions fear stops women to travel alone, focusing on

their practical life, and dealing with strangers, even this fear possesses the right to education from females. This insecurity in women, later on, passes from one generation to the next and continues to pass.

Apart from that one of the participants drags our attention to another mode. She is of the view that poverty or poor women are more likely to become the prey of violence, being weakened they can easily be harassed by outsiders and their husbands; men practice the same behavior they see on Facebook, and it can be either physical or economic violence. It intensifies the fear of the poor because every time they feel threatened. Fear and violence are directly proportional to each other, if one grows the other grows simultaneously; there is no limit for both fear and violence. The best way to cease the fear is to face it and for that self-confidence is needed for women.

Recommendations to strengthen women

As per the answers given by the participants, the most important thing to understand is that violence grows like fire until we take a step forward to put out the fire, lest it will end up destroying the entire humanity. Our participants gave many recommendations to avoid violence by strengthening women. The first part we can play in stopping the violence is to educate both girls and boys at their schools about gender equality and give them lessons on how and why should women be treated respectfully. This training must add the moral and ethical knowledge given to both males and females; females should also learn the right attitude that men deserve. The learning of legal and religious rights will enable them to be better humans and how to fight against violence. Along with the education, females should be trained at their educational institute about their self-defense to resist physical violence. A study conducted on "The Impact of Educational Intervention Based on Empowerment Model in Preventing Violence Against Women", showed that the frequency of domestic violence against female participants was significantly different before and after the educational intervention (Table 2). In other words, the incidence of domestic violence against female participants seems to have decreased after the educational intervention (Taghdisi et.al., 2014). Later on, the importance of being financially independent should be told to women; whether they are wives, daughters, or sisters, financial independence will enable them to avoid abuse and violence, and despite that society would also respect them.

To wind up the discussion, women should be taught that being a woman is not a weakness at all, they are not equal to men but rather elevated over men, and they cannot let men be violent with them whom they produce. They should become enough strong to be unbreakable. One bad incident should motivate them to grow instead of making them afraid because "Violence only exists when we allow it"(E, L3, 33)

CONCLUSION

The essence of the focus group was to study the effects of social media's violent-based content against women. All the answers of the participants of the focus group fetch the study to the relevance of cultivation theory. The answers prove the appropriation between the results of the study of focus groups which aimed to research violence-based content on Facebook and the cultivation effects. As social media specifically, Facebook is fabricating similar effects as television did on the public. Access to Facebook becomes easy every time and in every medium, and Facebook has made it uncomplicated for violence to spread. It offers a violent opportunity to spread violence and reaches every section (Calisir, 2015).

It has become a platform of freedom where people feel liberal, they think they have the right to say or to share violent content they want without thinking about its effects. This is how Facebook circulates hatred easily which results in misogyny. For example, the Khadija Akbar case, 2022, Noor Mukaddam case (2021), Motorway-II Rape Case, and Minar-e-Pakistan case (2021) were shared widely on Facebook and this was the first step that people take which consequently creates fear in women who use Facebook to get awareness and information. This notion of Facebook reflects the cultivation theory that asserted that the higher the level of television viewing, the higher the level of victimization fears (Doob, et. al., 2017) but we can sense the correspondence between the effects of social media and television; both create Mean World Syndrome in women to a large extent. It can be influenced either by using social media or by any personal experience; the usage of Facebook containing violent content and any piercing personal experience increase fright and mistrust in women.

According to the information obtained from the answers of the participants, it has been determined that oppression, use of force, and strain in other words primarily physical and psychological violence came into prominence as violence was in question. The trials of daily life have been encountered as a violent presentation on Facebook. Along with this, heavy viewers get deeper into the well of fear as compared to the one with personal experience. Facebook's content as a whole creates a symbolic cultural environment that influences the way we think and perceives the world around us (Morgan, 2009). The influenced or the Facebook content's victim does the mistake of bringing the somehow fake world into the real one, although Facebook is the representation of reality with some tint of exaggeration which is the main cause of the affected beliefs of women and being afraid of this world; because the already existing reality is unacceptable and gruesome; that exaggeration on Facebook does not help women in increasing their confidence. Facebook, by replicating the cultivation effect, increases the importance of cultivation research in general which has been strengthened in this study we are working on (Matei, 2012).

The study of the focus group focuses on the perceptions of viewers being negative which interlinks the study to Mean World Syndrome, which induces fear-related attitudes about reality (Morgan & Shanahan, 1999). Research broadens this concept by suggesting the mean-world syndrome implicitly refers to negative perceptions held by social media viewers (Appel, 2008). Thus, the study of the focus group is significant because it allows the criticism concerning cultivation theory to be restrained, as the utility of this theory moves beyond television towards social media, particularly Facebook. Therefore, cultivation theory is appropriate for this study because research contends that mediated reality influences attitude and perceptions through mainstreaming, mean world syndrome, and resonance (Nevzat, 2018).

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