

SELF-REPRESENTATION THROUGH ONLINE IDENTITIES: A CDA OF OFFICIAL WEBSITES OF PAKISTANI UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Virtual world of Internet has provided a dynamic virtual space to the organizations like universities to represent themselves to a wider audience in a fast manner as well as construct desired online identities. In this article, we examined linguistic features in Pakistani universities' websites and explored the ways Pakistani universities make use of virtual space to construct certain preferred online identities in and around organization. The use of digital affordances such as anonymity and visibility in these websites add to the preferred self-representation of the universities. Eight Pakistani universities' websites are selected for analysis using purposive sampling technique. The study employs critical discourse analysis and follows a three-dimensional analysis including textual analysis, process analysis and social analysis. The findings indicate that Pakistani universities' websites are highly affected due to social changes such as globalization and commercialization of education. These websites are developed with a common purpose of constructing global identity, display international standard and high reputation among other universities as well as attract potential students. The analysis further revealed that these websites are a medium to construct various desired individual and collective online identities. Such diversified web-based constructs of university identities allow themselves to portrayal of both prominent as well as distinguished among all. As an outcome, the choice of website audience (who is not limited to students rather faculty, employees, and donors), regarding their future endeavors is influenced.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis, online identity construction, Pakistani universities websites, homepage, linguistic features, visibility through digital affordances.

INTRODUCTION

Globally advanced world of digital technology has transformed communication dynamics globally and locally and higher education institutions are also impacted by it (Carnoy, 2005). The World Wide Web offers academic institutions an opportunity to create a digital identity for themselves. Websites of HEI have emerged as the pervasive tool of communication and information (Caglar & Mentis 2012) so much so that the website portal is now an integral component of any institution as it serves as a visiting card which provides the organization with a global identity and presence on internet (Barikzai, 2009). Traditionally, academic institutions relied on prospectuses, mission statements, brochures and Open House Fairs to reach to a potential community of students, faculty or funding agencies to advertise them. Though these traditional means are still relevant the websites have become the primary mode of seeking information in an increasing digital and global world. The vast majority of institutions are providing web-enabled services through functional, easy-to-use and easily maintained institutional websites (Joicy & Varghese, 2011; Chow, Bridges & Commander, 2014).

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Homepages of educational institutions' websites offer a lot of information ([Hite, & Railsback, 2010](#)) such as promoting the academic experience, recruiting student through websites, advertising research-informed teaching and research results with a purpose of communicating institutional characteristics, constructing the identity of the institution as well as marketing it digitally ([Anctil, 2008](#); [Astani & Elhindi, 2008](#); [Meyer & Jones, 2012](#); [Saichaie & Morphew, 2014](#); [Tomášková, 2015](#)). In the evolving digital continuum academic institutions are under increasing pressure to create a website that promotes university's self image and constructs a positive institutional identity ([Peterson, 2006](#); [Du Toit & Bothma, 2009](#); [Rungruangsuparat, 2016](#); [Kim, J, Kim, H., Lee, & Ahn, 2016](#)). Moreover, website is an effective tool in the contemporary competitive academic marketplace to attract resources through more customers, attain institutional admissibility, social superiority and political authority that bring economic balance ([DiMaggio & Powell, 1983](#); [Saichaie & Morphew, 2014](#)) as well as demonstrate the shifting features of discursive practices ([Chernyavskaya, 2019](#)).

In Pakistan, colleges and universities are rapidly adapting to the globalized effect of digital change and almost every university has an official website for fast dissemination of information, more so in an effort to market themselves better in a commercially competitive world. The present paper is a study of academic websites of Pakistan and attempts to evaluate the use of language in digital constructing of its identity.

Identity construction in academic discourse has been a part of research for quite some time but in the digital age the question of identity construction and higher education has stirred much discussion ([Erwin, 2005](#); [Churchman & King, 2009](#); [Hansson 2010](#); [Shafiea et al., 2012](#); [Ylijoki & Ursin, 2013](#); [Perveen, 2015](#); [Madikizela -Madiya & Roux, 2017](#); [Flecknoe, 2017](#); [Luzon, 2018](#); [Djerasimovic & Villani, 2020](#); [Alkhateeb et al., 2020](#)) especially due to the transitioning role of a university towards commercialism and globalization of education ([Bok, 2003](#); [Kaneko, 2006](#); [Jain, 2009](#); [Akyilsiz & Onekiz, 2010](#); [Aziz, et. al., 2013](#); [Kezar & Sierra, 2016](#); [Amzat, 2016](#); [Zhang, 2017](#); [Shahnaz & Qadir, 2020](#)). Digital age has globalized the education systems and has posed new challenges to education system. Therefore current study is relevant because it recognizes the challenges Pakistani institutions face to present a self image through a website by the VC of the universities in their messages.

Academic identity is widely challenged by the advancement in digital technologies as digital space of internet offers a unique combination of virtual affordances, anonymity and visibility to the higher education institutions to create a self image for themselves, differentiate them from other universities and reach a wider number of audiences in faster manner through various marketing practices that influence the individuals, especially prospective students. The traditional role of university to impart knowledge and education is held back and more emphasis is given to revenue, promotion and market share. Universities around the world are adapting strategies to enable them to survive in the new competitive environment ([Portfelt, 2006](#)) of virtual marketplace. [Kezar and Sierra \(2016\)](#) label it as commercialization of higher education as an academic capitalist regime wherein universities exhibit market-based behavior. It has now become crucial for universities of developing countries like Pakistan to revise their systems and become more adaptable in a globalized virtual environment.

Digital technology enables higher education institutions to new forms of interaction as well as new forms of identity ([Barandiaran, Lopez & Cozzo, 2020](#)). In a virtual environment, a specific goal is often to attain 'visibility' or invoke a feeling of 'presence' ([Blom, 2013](#)) and establish an effective communication environment ([Khan, Si, & Khan, 2019](#)) in and around organization. For instance, the display of detailed information about the university, its campuses, courses, admissions, facilities, preferences, international linkages on a university's official website make it visible in the virtual space and hence the information which was once invisible becomes visible to others around the globe ([Trem & Leonardi, 2012](#)).

Non-verbal elements such as facial expressions, bodily gestures, vocal qualities and physical impression are absent in this virtual world. In some instances it is almost impossible to verify the narratives given online which makes the online identity separate from offline or 'real' world identity. This is the outcome of virtual anonymity. Collective identity of institutions is an interactive and shared activity in which several individuals share a sense of 'oneness' or 'we-ness' ([Snow, 2001](#)) in real or virtual environment. This sense of one-ness motivates individuals to work together for collective interests.

Affordance is an essential feature of interaction design. Gibson proposed the term “affordance” in 1977, suggesting to all action potentials of an object drawn on users’ physical capabilities ([Norman, 1988](#)). [Norman \(1988\)](#) defines affordances and suggests that they are “the possible interactions between people and the environment” (p.19) Norman further adds that they are relationships rather than property. An affordance is co-established by the object and the thing or person interacting with it ([Norman, p.11, 1988](#); [Hammond, 2010](#)). In media and communication technology, affordance is users’ fundamental to use and understanding of technology and its mutual relationship. Digital affordances are “eroding boundaries between real and the virtual, the animate and the inanimate” ([Turkle, 1995, p.10](#)) as well as individual and collective online identities thus allowing the users to exercise maximum control over self-representation ([Roberts and Parks, 2005](#)). Similarly, many identities are deliberately performed by individuals to become part of the mainstream. However, this idea is relevant for the organizations as well.

The purpose of this research is to study critical identity processes in the websites of Pakistani universities through linguistic resources to create a unique image for themselves locally and globally amidst globalization and commercialism and examine how affordances aid in the construction of collective self image and identity processes. Following research questions will be addressed in the process (i) What are the critical identity processes involved in online identity construction of universities in virtual space through the use of language? (ii) How do universities’ websites exploit virtual affordances through language and promote themselves on internet and construct certain preferred online identities? The study may reveal the linguistic identity processes in the websites particularly used by the Messages of the VC and may help the website designers to represent a more inclusive identity of the university which benefits the stakeholders and project a website as a place of information and education rather than only marketization

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Globalization and Commercialization of Education

In recent years, globalization has greatly advanced through the use of technology ([Bajwa, 2009](#)) and has significantly impacted the way higher education institutions present themselves. It demands higher education sector to bring revolutionary changes in order to cope with the challenges of new globalized society ([Tarar, 2006](#); [Hoang & Lizana, 2015](#); [Naz, 2016](#)). Globalization in academics typically means partnerships among institutions, creating international exchange programs, synchronizing academic programs and degree to international standards, meeting global ranking criterion and shaping themselves as global identities to remain relevant ([Teo, 2007](#); [Strassel, 2018](#)). Institutions are now more connected to international universities; competing to get international rankings for university’s prestige; and providing opportunities to teachers and students to stay abreast with the fast changing technological world ([Wilson, 2010](#)). In Pakistan, universities are highly influenced by globalization and internationalization and this impact is prominent in message of the vice chancellor displayed on a university’s official website.

The most advanced way of achieving global connection is through websites for swift dissemination and/or gathering of information or visibility made possible through the advanced technology which has transformed websites. The governments and organizations around the world use websites as primary form of information communication and act like a market place where every organization is in a constant competition with other institutions ([Tomaskova, 2015](#); [Rungruangsuparat, 2016](#); [Ismail & Kuppusamy, 2018](#)).

In the context of globalization and internationalization there are other impacts on higher education as well. HE is now treated more as a commodity. The priorities of universities are transformed. Most of the universities are now functioning to generate increased revenue and commercialization of education is normalized ([Wilson, 2010](#); [Jibeen & Khan, 2015](#); [Khan, 2017](#); [Riaz, Jabeen, Salman, Ansari & Moazzam, 2017](#); [Ali, Saeed & Munir, 2018](#); [Hyder, Arshad & Baig, 2019](#); [Kalsoom, Taj & Saleem, 2020](#)) and the principal standards and values are now associated with entrepreneurship and commercial interests ([Waite, Moos & Lew, 2005](#)). As a result of “institutionalisation of the policies of marketisation” ([Furedi, 2010](#)) and consequent commercialism among universities, the universities websites are a site of competitive marketplace to introduce their products and compete for consumers ([Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015](#)). The transformed culture of

academic life leads to use of language and other resources to represent /create a distinctive image for promotional means ([Sanigar, 2013](#)).

Online and collective identity/ies

In the contemporary global internationalization world, internet has offered a virtual platform to individuals, groups and communities where they can deliberately choose a certain desired identity for themselves. In this way, online identity construction is seen as an act of performance. Online identity refers to the “online self–presentation, of individuals or organizations on internet which include different ways by which users present themselves to other online users” ([Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011, p. 63](#)). It is more appropriate to use the word identities which mean that identity is not fixed or predetermined in the virtual worlds especially and constantly transforming based on contexts, interactions, and interlocutors ([Lee, 2014](#)). This paper uses the term online identity equivalent to digital identities of academic institutions. The term suggests the virtual world which gives access to universities to extend their image beyond the physical existence of an infrastructure and build their cyber identity/identities in and around organization for faster, quicker dissemination of information. A university website offers a platform where academic discourse is being utilized to construct preferred online individual and collective identities. Collective identity is a combination of group organization, affection and solidarity with a larger community, system or institution. Collective identities are often expressed by narratives, verbal choices, symbols etc. with positive views and attitude towards other members of group ([Polletta & Jasper, 2001](#)). This paper examines the Messages of the VCs to find out how institutional websites represent their self image and which concepts are showcased and what kind of identity of university is portrayed.

Identity Construction in Universities’ Websites

Identity is a two-way process ([Cameron, 2001](#)). Audience of a university website interpret the information according to their understanding and cultural context and therefore co-construct the academic identity of the university in online space. The prefix ‘co’ implies that ‘more than one individual is responsible for the construction of identity in different context. Moreover, the individuals involved in the process of identity construction may not always be supportive ([Deckert & Vickers, 2011](#)).

[Al-Qahtani \(2021\)](#) in an analysis of Saudi universities claim that the websites provide cursory information about vital subjects such as , campus , academic majors, registration, and financial aid. [Saichaie \(2014\)](#) and [Caiazzo, \(2013\)](#) in two separate studies assert that institutions use promotional discourse for marketization purposes and select and emphasize information of their choice hence retaining control over the actors. [Saichaie \(2014\)](#) claims chosen information carefully highlights obligatory measures by ignoring important issues. Therefore the social institution’s role as a center of teaching and research is reduced. [Caiazzo \(2013\)](#) adds that possessive adjectives such as “you”, “your”, pronouns and the inclusive “our” are used to include intended readers in the discourse. [Al-Qahtani \(2021\)](#) also adds that universities websites uses phrases like as “leaders”, “Vision 2030”, “distinguished education” and “competent” frequently appear without further explanations, thus triggering uncertainty. [Poock and Lefond \(2001\)](#) signify that websites create content around the audience which is user friendly rather than functional.

Adding to this idea further, [Hoang & Rojas-Lizana \(2015\)](#) add that this kind of discourse bank upon relationship with potential students and gain other resources. This discourse shows impact of globalization and the trend of academic marketing on higher education. This type of discourse is utilized by the universities to promote themselves in order attract more students. However, the representation of universities is not only determined by the social trends, but also their own tradition and reputation. [Ali, Amin & Shahid \(2020\)](#) also add that homepages of Pakistani website construct information as a bait to attract students. [Gray, Fam, & Llanes \(2003\)](#) and conducted a survey on branding universities in the Asian markets and suggested that a standardized media mix could be used to promote universities.

[Temple \(2006\)](#) claims that in the contemporary academic scenario, the marketing of HE institution is achieved for better reputation and public relations but the strategies used for marketing are akin to advertising elements product, identity, and values in the context of higher education. The problem lays the way the HE intuitions build a unique identity for them online. In an effort to create a unique communicative identity for them by relying on heritage but they instead fail to practice what they claim ([Chapleo, 2008](#)).

This article is based on how Pakistani HE institutions construct and represent their identity online in websites. Literature shows that in websites, homepages create an identity narrative, that is, the claims pertaining to their character, exclusive aspects which are distinct and fall onto four categories : guild-like classic narrative, professional scientific narrative, localized narrative, and organizational narrative ([Drori, Delmestri, & Oberg, 2016](#)). [Wilson & Carlsen \(2016\)](#) in a study assert that missions of charter institutional websites operate as discursive texts by warranting the academic place as worthy of families and school and vice versa. The narratives employed may fall under narratives of race, culture or diversity; different meanings of academic achievements and different beliefs of individualized learning. The researchers further believe that websites contribute to differentiation in academic marketplace.

[Teo & Ren \(2019\)](#) analyzed Presidents Messages of Chinese top HEI and found discursive bureaucratic, conversational and advertising narratives constructed in and around the move structure of the presidents' messages. Furthermore, the narratives show contending essentials and contestations revealing presidents' messages to present global outlook as well as preserving an adherence to national political and ideologies.

In another research by [Vadakepat & Menon \(2019\)](#) into the Arab students online behavior of opting for a university, they emphasize that websites narratives in international websites should be adapted to the cultural expectations, practices and preferences of regional audience. In other words, the global aspects should be combined with local aspects to adapt to the specific regional experiences. In the context of the study of Pakistani websites of HEI, the narratives should be glocalised, that is, local trends should be merged with global demands in the messages of the VCs.

Digital affordances such as anonymity, visibility and interactivity, allows an organization to construct, distribute and substitute information in different formats and with wider audience ([Leonardi & Vaast, 2017](#)) and hence shaping a unique online identity in virtual space. [Treem and Leonardi \(2012\)](#) claimed that the use of digital affordances in an organizational setting can "alter socialization, knowledge sharing and power processes in organization (p. 143). However, the exploitation of digital affordances to construct certain desired online identity is yet to be explored.

[Lorés-Sanz and Herrando-Rodrigo \(2020\)](#) delved into the concept of e-visibility in websites of international research projects. The research asserts that the websites employ discursive digital practices achieved lexicographically in combination with digital modes of affordances specific to virtual world. They found different types of e-visibility namely "impersonated" "collective e-visibility" "individual e-visibility" and "multifaceted e-visibility" and make specific aspects of the project visible. According to them Impersonated and multifaceted e-visibility make the project visible whereas collective and individual e-visibility highlight the partners and researchers respectively. These types mean the following: Impersonated e-visibility, found in About section, means pertaining to the project and employs proper nouns along with the visuals and logos; collective e-visibility, found in Partners section, refers to the institution and uses proper nouns along with the logos; Individual e-visibility relates with the project and employs proper and common nouns and self mentioning phases; lastly Multifaceted-visibility is found in Events & News section, uses proper nouns and images of researchers make the research project visible.

Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to the investigation of discourse that analyze language as a type of social practice, suggestive of an internal and dialectical connection linking language and society ([Fairclough, 2013](#); [Coffin et al., 2014](#); [van Dijk, 1993](#)). Fairclough ([1989, 2013](#)) three-dimensional model for discourse analysis relates to three dimensions of discourse textual, process and societal corresponding to description stages focus on linguistic elements of the text; interpretation stage studies the text's production and consumption, focusing on factors used to construct and interpret text; social stage explain the broad social contexts that are affecting the text being studied ([Mogashoa, 2014](#)).

The research framework developed for the current study is a combination of two distinct approaches namely, Norman Fairclough (1989) model of CDA and Hilary Janks (2005) linguistic analysis rubric. The study analyzes selected linguistic data from Pakistani universities' websites to understand how universities' websites exploit virtual affordances through language to get anonymity or e-visibility in critical identity processes for online identity construction in virtual space.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is utilized by many researchers to analyze language features and investigate the phenomenon of identity construction ([Liu, 2018](#); [Qazi & Shah, 2018](#); [Zulaikha, 2018](#); [Liu and Wanxin, 2019](#); [Hasan & Mohammed, 2019](#)). The language utilized in academic setting

is highly affected by globalization and commercialization of education. The language in universities websites, prospectuses, academic job advertisements are highly influenced by marketization practices (Osman, 2008; Han, 2014; Kheovichai, 2014; Alhojailan, 2020; Shahnaz, Fatima, & Qadir, 2020;) and construct unique institutional/organizational identity. The review of previous literature indicates that a detailed critical discourse analysis of vice chancellor's message displayed in universities' websites is overlooked. This provides a strong rationale to fill the research gap in the literature of universities website analysis.

RESEARCH METHOD

This paper is a qualitative research. Eight Pakistani universities' websites are selected from the 'General category' of HEC ranking list through purposive sampling technique. HEC (Higher Education Commission) is a renowned organization in Pakistan responsible for funding, supervising, controlling and accrediting the universities in Pakistan. The selected sample of universities' websites are named according to the rank of institution, such as W1, W2, W3, W5, W6, W7, W8 and W9. The official websites of the universities are regularly updated from time to time. The Messages of VCs are analyzed from selected Pakistani universities' websites. The linguistic data for the present study was collected during the month of January, 2020. The analysis of various linguistic features utilized by the VCs in their messages will help to locate diverse online identities of the universities which are purposely shaped in the virtual space.

In the paper, the data is analyzed in the form of thematic categories based on Creswell's category of qualitative audio and visual data collection method, however, it only analyzes linguistic data. Each category is analyzed in three phases, that is, textual, process and social analysis. Linguistic features for textual analysis are adapted from Janks (2005) linguistic analysis rubric as presented in table below. The textual analysis facilitates micro analysis of linguistic features to understand the design of the text and establishes the basis for process and social analysis.

Table 1: Linguistic features adapted from Janks (2005) rubric for linguistic analysis of text

Serial No	Linguistic features for analysis	Explanation
1	Lexicalization	The selection/choice of words.
3	Nominalization	A process turned into an event. In this study nominalizations from verb forms are examined
4	Polarity and Tense	Positive/Negative polarity. Tense tells the definiteness of events.
3	Mood	Is the clause a statement, question, offer or command?
4	Modality	Modality created by the use of modal verbs (may, might, could, will)
5	Use of Pronouns	Inclusive we/ exclusive we/you

The linguistic features selected for textual analysis form a set of parameters to perform process and social analysis of linguistic data via Fairclough (1989) model of CDA. The process and social analysis was performed simultaneously. It will help to understand the relationship between the text and its producers (Fairclough, 1995), process of production (university website) and consumption (reading) as well as explains that why the text has been used in a specific way to understand that how do the universities' websites exploit virtual affordances through language and promote themselves on internet and construct certain preferred online identities.

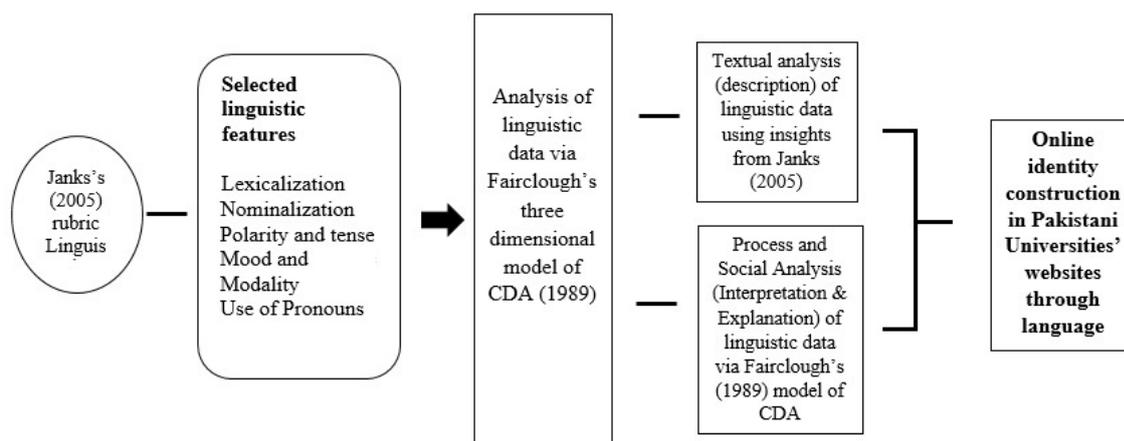


Figure 1: *Research framework for the current research*

At first, linguistic data, that is message from VCs is divided into codes and categories using insights from [Creswell \(2014\)](#) series of eight steps for coding qualitative data provided by Tesch (as cited in [Creswell, 2014](#)). These steps are adapted and utilized as described below. Subsequently, each category was analyzed within the devised research framework. Five categories emerged after coding of the linguistic data as presented below in Table.

Table 2: Categories of linguistic data through coding

S/No	Categories of analysis
1	Aims and commitments
2	Knowledge and expertise
3	Motivation and support
4	Future goals & Upcoming projects

The findings from the analysis of 8 Pakistani universities' websites, namely, W1, W2, W3, W5, W6, W7, W8 and W9 revealed that the primary purpose of these websites is to provide information. However, in doing so, it molds the information as promotional, persuasive and commercial purposes. These discourses promote and projects dominant and influential identity of the universities on internet. It further publicizes the institution among the academic world, attract more students and seize better funding opportunities.

DATA ANALYSIS

The linguistic data that is message of VCs is divided into categories using insights from [Creswell \(2014\)](#) series of eight steps for coding qualitative data provided by Tesch (as cited in [Creswell, 2014](#)). These steps are adapted and utilized as described below. Subsequently, each category was analyzed within the devised research framework.

The findings from the analysis of 8 Pakistani universities' websites, namely, W1, W2, W3, W5, W6, W7, W8 and W9 revealed that these websites are contesting for visibility on the internet through the cautious use of virtual affordances and using anonymity to their advantage. The content is moulded in the form of informational, promotional, persuasive and commercial manner. These discourses promote and projects dominant and influential identity of the universities on internet. It further publicizes the institution among the academic world, attract more students and seize better funding opportunities.

Category 1- Aims & Commitments

This category includes goals and promises that the institution wants to accomplish and are signaled by the VCs in the messages. The promises are made to the exiting members of the staff and students and potential students.

The most important idea in the VCs messages is the announcement of aims and commitments indicated in the form of declaration or statement. The sentences portray positive polarity as the VC wants to assert certainly of events and create an evidence of golden future prospects. The use of present

tense develops readers' interest more as compared to past tense because the use of present tense enables the reader to feel the experiences and emotions shared by the writer/speaker.

In W1, the use of personal pronoun *we*, is inclusive of VC and the faculty members to indicate their mutual efforts to evoke objectivity and creativity in their students through theoretical and practical knowledge. Interestingly, the commitment is shown through the use of proper nouns for e-visibility. The emphasis on *productivity* (nominalized form of product) *of graduates* displays anonymity of the producer (teachers) while emphasizing the product (students). The use of personal pronoun *my* in W2 and W7, personalizes the commitment of the VC and his authority to speak on behalf of the university.

In W3, W6 and W7, pronoun *our*, is used to appreciate the collective contribution of the university members in the domain of knowledge and research and inform the reader about mutual responsibility of every member of society to work for the progress of the country. Use of proper noun highlights the university and ascertains the commitment to agriculture in specific and other field in general through research culture for the betterment of country and its economy. Unlike other messages, no stakeholders have been mentioned in this text. In W6, proper noun "Pakistan" is used to make the country visible.

Nominalizations such as, *advancement of knowledge* and *achievements in research* in W3, nominalized forms *contribution to agricultural advancement* and *prosecution of research* in W5 shows objectivity and creates an impersonal tone because nominalizations are used here to anonymize the doers of the said action and emphasize the product. The frequent use of word *excellence* in educational context suggests high degree performance. Furthermore, the term is vague and implicit which suggests a relationship between distinction and superiority (MacCabe & Yanacek, 2018).

Process and Social Analysis Category 1- Aims & Commitments

In the text, language is used in a manner to highlight certain actions and themes to make the institution visible and communicate intention behind a message. Two very important tools for accomplishing this communicative task are verbs and modality. The commitments made by the head of an institution reflect the future of the university to create a reputation of the institution. The aims and commitments seen in the texts in this category fall within the domain of academia, critical thinking, research based education, holistic development, innovation, agricultural, leadership traits, development and dedication for motherland. The choice of specific words by the VCs associates themselves with specific aims and commitments and serves to dissociate other institutions from other which may have different commitments and aims.

In the website W1 leadership focuses on two things: promise of the university to produce students who are empowered with knowledge and skill set to be successful in life, academically and personally hence highlights the university. The use of verbs like "committed", "help", "will find" and "achieve" are significant. The purpose of this discourse is twofold: to show the high reputation of university on one hand and on other direct students attention to their bright future which ensures job opportunities.

On the other hand, VCs of W2, W6 and W7 the emphasize is on the graduates and leaders for the betterment of national economy who can play a positive role in all sectors of the country resulting in shaping a nationalistic identity. The instigation of merit oriented system in W7 the verbs "develop", "offers" and "commitment" focus the attention on the university as dominant and portray it as prominent in the academia.

Conversely, in W3 the aim of the institution is equated with acquisition of knowledge with contemporary market trends and demands in a declarative statement. In W5 again the use of proper noun highlights the university and ascertains the commitment to agriculture in specific and other field in general through research culture for the betterment of country and its economy. Unlike other messages, no stakeholders have been mentioned in this text. This text is evident that commitment of the institution is with producing graduates for the better economy but there is no reference to the gender, race or different ethnicities or cultural, historical or nationalistic values. It shows that the focus is on the visibility of the institution for creating global discourse.

Category 2- Knowledge & Expertise

This category includes discourse about the expertise of the faculty members, disciplines and programs offered at the universities. In W1, the nucleus of the message is research practices of the institution. The use of pronoun *our*, is inclusive of students which implies that the university appreciates the abilities and success of its students in every field. VC of W3 acknowledges the efforts of the faculty members

and appreciates their outstanding achievements and efforts in transforming students into responsible citizens. Nominalized form *development* implies that the advancement of students is described as a continuous process instead of a goal to be achieved.

The details of the offered programs are described by the VC of W5. The choice of words in this category informs the reader about the struggle of the university to maintain a prominent position in the domain of academia. Message of the VC of W6 in this category ascribes the hallmark of its institution to research based teaching. The efforts of the faculty members is highlighted and appreciated by the VC.

In W7, the VC offers copious amount of information to the audience in lines 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12 and 13 with reference to the category of knowledge and expertise. The VC aims to establish a research culture in education and reforming academic disciplines, research infrastructure, libraries and laboratories. In W9, the VC informs the reader about the policy of revision and modernizing educational curriculum on regular basis to make students able to deal with issues related to their field of study. Inclusive pronoun *our*, in W8 and W9 shows possession and control e.g. *our academic curriculum*, *our students*, *our up to date libraries*, to provide better educational opportunities.

Process and Social Analysis of Knowledge & Expertise

W1 and W3 acknowledge the efforts of the faculty members to obtain a prestigious position of the university as well as appreciates the bright students whose knowledge and research practices work in close proximity with the faculty to make the university a top notch institution. The discourses reflect an advanced and prestigious identity of both universities. The text reflects a combination of promotional and persuasive discourse to promote institution's prestige and persuade potential students and faculty to pick this institution as their first choice. The message is concentrated on building a strong image of the institution instead of weighing it on the academic quality.

Among all messages, W6 stands out because of the features enlisted such as, inquiry based learning, student-centered approach, freedom of choice for students, collaborative learning community, students as productive social efficiency agents, shaping of intellectual freedom, global standards at the institution, faculty excellence and personal interest of leadership in students' development. All of these traits of the institution are foregrounded against the institutional identity.

The text of W7 provides the reader with excessive details about transformations carried out by him at the university which shows a highly concerned attitude of the leadership towards his duties. However, the message does not state the practical measures or strategies taken by the leadership. The discourse is seemingly truthful and honest and enlists the struggles of the institution to adapt to contemporary academic needs. There is no mention of the future vision of the institution.

In W5 and W9, very concise information is provided by the VCs. The disciplines are enumerated to show the range of programs offered. W9 makes one of the most significant claims that it updates its syllabus according to contemporary students' requirements but the message does not give any specifics of the process.

The analysis of the category of knowledge and expertise gives an idea that each university has made an effort to highlight its expertise and skills in the best possible way on internet. On the whole, the most highlighted ideas are: emphasis on research, competent faculty, improved and updated departments, encouraging innovation and updated course curriculum.

Category 3- Motivation & Support

Researches in the domain of communication and leadership ascertain that there is a direct link between leaders' intention and audience outcomes ([Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012](#)). The category of motivation and support includes encouraging discourse of inspiration and motivation towards the audience including students and staff members.

The examples of lexicalization by the VC of W1 such as *commitment* & the proper noun with *QAU* with *community* indicates that the university is concerned about the academic and personal activities of its students in a progressive way.

Pursuing education at W3 is described as a life changing experience where students are encouraged to think critically about their social responsibilities. *Responsibility* (responsible), and *sustainability* (to sustain) are nominalized forms which are used to highlight the main idea of the discourse, which is endowing them with lifelong skills and make them active business partners through entrepreneurship skills. Students are encouraged to become responsible and supportive members of the society. In W3, the use of modal verb *will* provides assurance of a prosperous future given to students.

The focus is on the *acquisition of knowledge* as well as *values*, where *acquisition* (nominalized form of acquire) describes the process of learning as an ongoing activity whereas *values* refer to the fundamental beliefs which guide a person about his actions (Mintz, 2018). The lexicalization further shows that the VC takes pride in the recognition from employers and the value of his university's degree. A strong attempt to convince the reader is presented in this line.

An extensive data under the category of motivation and support is identified in W8. Personal pronoun *I*, indicates the commitment & authority of the VC to assure potential students for assistance from faculty and administration. Students from other cities and countries are attracted for luxurious lodging facilities which can be interpreted as a strategy to gain more admissions. The use of modal verb *will* shows the degree of certainty about the declarations made by the VC. The use of modal verb *must* indicate stress and importance given by VC on the matters of student societies. The detail in this regard, shows the concern of VC towards students and their coordination. Overall, the discourse shows that a student centered approach is valued and practically implemented by the VC. The message is potentially directed towards seizing the attention of more prospective students as they are a source of financial resources.

The leadership makes a polite request to students using modal verb *would* and personal pronoun *I*, which effectively creates a personal relationship with the audience and mitigates formality. The nominalized forms, *achievements* (to achieve) and *participation* (to participate) indicates the focal point of the message of the VC. He expects from the students to show success and participate in departmental activities so that their accomplishments can be represented on official website. Such depiction on university's website may attract a larger number of students. The leadership also addresses new female students of few disciplines. The class schedules and related information is shared in detail. This is only one example in which the leadership specifically directs the message towards female students which depicts his awareness towards women and the social dynamics and concern towards them.

Moreover, it is observed that the modal verb *must* and *should* are used together to emphasizes the importance of the statement made by the VC. *Must* indicates obligation and *should* indicate a suggestion by the VC. The students are advised to focus on their studies as it is their first responsibility towards parents and then society. The message shows that the persona of the speaker is that of a father figure who is aware how to talk to young learners.

In W9, under the category of motivation and support, the VC describes the facilities offered to the students which include qualified faculty, modern labs and air-conditioned libraries. The access to HEC digital library and its benefit for both the teachers and students is highlighted. The students are encouraged to be a part of an institution which offers various facilities and most important of all is access to digital library. The lack of use of any pronouns is strikingly significant as it refers the attention of the audience towards the faculties described.

Process and Social Analysis of Motivation and Support

In all the above texts, it is seen that the mention of strategic global activities is a common equation. The texts provide out-of-the classroom experiences. The texts are mechanized towards potential students and high polarity indicates that it is the institution's task to provide a supporting platform to the students. While the common purpose of this text to show solidarity with the students, highlight the institutional reputation, each institution does it a specific manner that shows that "education" is a product they are selling to the audience.

In W1, the strategy for e-visibility is students' personal and academic development through lexicalization, proper nouns and normalized forms of verbs to show the functional role and commitment of the institution towards students. However, the claims are backed by any practical measures. The institutional identity strongly highlights dedication, success and communal promises.

In the other hand, W3, the VC refers to institutions academic heritage and academic development which will ensure professional and entrepreneurship opportunity as well as communal responsibility of the students. The VC uses the word "caring" to show support which creates a warm and strong mutual association. It is also worthwhile to mention that this discourse is for a student who is well read, smart and ready to take the challenges of the academic world. So, an identity of a strong mutual association of the university is shown. .

In W8 & W9, elaborate details of motivation and support are given through a long list of infrastructure, resources & support programs. These two texts, by far, stand out among other texts. This strategic list provides the students with a textual institutional experience, skill centered site of learning,

and promise of future employment. The text of W8 carefully elaborates students' support programs such as infrastructure, student societies, communication office, career development center, campus management, and fund raising center. The assertions by the VC show the practical measures of an institution which identifies its public image through practical information. The text also highlights ethical responsibility of the students that is, refraining from gossip and rumors. However, the text does not provide diversity as the VC points out the facilities for "male" students only.

In W9, the students are motivated through new and improved semester system, infrastructure, highly qualified teachers, international awards and fellowship opportunities. The carefully crafted messages juxtapose student support with the provision of resources and infrastructure.

Student support and motivation is an important element in the field of higher education. It helps to encourage young learners to use their creativity and skills in the relevant field of study (Bartram, 2009). The messages from the VCs contain a vast amount of discourse which is purposefully generated to motivate the prospective students as well as already enrolled students. In all these texts, students' expectations are raised. They are strategically provided with the aspects of university experiences, or activities the institution wants the students to picture and craft the idea that the institution is the only place which can fulfill these expectations of the students. This shows that the messages have created a relational or familiar discourse for the students. However, there are differences in the ways of motivation offered to the students by the VCs.

The discourse in this category further shows that the head of the institutions are not targeting individuals from a single community, class or gender rather different attractions are presented for every individual. The main motive of a university is to gain admissions and for this reason, every individual is considered equally important regardless of their gender, class or economic or geographical background.

Category 4- Future Goals and Upcoming Projects

This category reveals new developmental projects which are launched at the universities for the betterment of students as well as to improve the system and resources of the university. The information about upcoming projects at the university shows that the university is growing and has the potential to bring innovation by facilitating the students and teachers with advanced programs and projects.

It is interesting to note that only two messages point out future projects to gain visibility. The VC of W7 uses present continuous tense to inform the readers about the developing linkages with the industry in Faisalabad. The pronoun *we* is used to describe the shared efforts of VC and the faculty members to develop association with the industry. Modal verb *will* shows certainty and confirmation by the VC about opening of a research center in future.

On the contrary In W9, the VC share details about various upcoming projects initiated and operating at the university. The noun *Enrichment* (nominalized form of enrich) is used to inform the reader about the up gradation of libraries, laboratories, accommodation, infrastructure resources such as conference halls, international partnership with academic institutions and mutual understanding among different cultures and countries. The link with international universities is highlighted and it is considered as an important step in appreciating other cultures.

Process and Social Analysis Future Goals and Upcoming Projects

The enumeration of future goals is an endeavor to put up the institution on display. When a reader reads such a text, an emotional response is aroused and the institution's distinctiveness, prestige and power are highlighted.

In W7, the leader of the institution understands the importance of converging knowledge with practical experience, hence anticipated association with the industries. Faisalabad is an industrial city and association with industries may facilitate the university to flourish.

In W9, excessive details of upcoming projects are described in relation to the institution, to highlight role of the institution as resourceful. One verb is used to refer to the students, whereas a few passive sentences have been used to grammatically reallocate the projects without referring the beneficiaries. Another interesting idea in this message is creating harmony between different cultures through international linkages. The idea of creating responsible students and citizens is necessity of a tolerant social fabric. This discourse is global in nature but it fails to say anything about indigenous culture.

DISCUSSION

The most pervasive linguistic strategies for e –visibilities found in the texts of the VCs show a strong association between language, power and ideologically created messages and can be summed up as below:

Online Identity of power and influence: It is observed that the texts are contesting to present their academic institution’s identity as the sole knowledge site of power and influence online identity of the institution. The texts emphasize the rank of the institution as in W1 and W3, national and international linkages in W3, W7 and W9, number of enrolled students in W3 . The linguistic strategies employed to gain visibility is proper nouns (using the name of the university), lexicalization (emphasizing personal attributes of the university such as year it was established, core disciplines offered) and nominalization (highlighting global partnerships).

Online Identity of prestigious academic institution: Unlike the above category, this category presents the self image of the university as the most prestigious one among other for e-visibility. The choice of words/lexicalization, metaphors and nominalization interestingly indicated the on-going procedures or future intentions of the leadership to append prestige to the institution except in W7 who refers to past contributions in the domain of academia. Some examples of intentions are commitment to produce skilled graduates in W1; advancement in research and achievements in W3, use of metaphors by the in W8 to inspire the readers and glorify the status of the institution, the discourse of motivation and achievement in W9.

Online Identity of innovation and advancement: This category shoes the global outlook of the institution in the most pronounced manner. There is an emphasis on research based education in W1, W3, W5, W6, W7 and W9, furthermore, there is a commitment to provide professional education to youth in W3, use of specific pedagogical terminologies in W6, information about updated curriculum in W7 and details of upcoming projects in W7 and W9 shapes an online identity of innovation and advancement. The deliberate stress on collective efforts and list of transference activities through the use of ‘our’ create a sense of shared responsibility.

Online collective Identity of professionalism and trust: An identity of professionalism and trust is deliberately constructed in texts by highlighting institutional resources and potential such as scholarly faculty, prestigious status, high ranking, renowned international status and associations, and world class research opportunities. Through lexicalization and nominalization the commitment to support students’ academics and personal growth in W1, fostering skilled values along with education in W3, and establishment of student centered approach in W8 portrays an online collective identity of trust and professionalism.

Online Identity of nationalism: Nationalistic overtones are propounded in four texts which claim the identity through patriotic spirit and align its mission with national vision. Therefore, a collective identity representation takes place through pronouns. In W2 the use of personal pronoun ‘I’ shows the individual desire, subjectivity and authority of leadership to improve national economy by producing more graduates and imparting quality education.

On the other hand, W6 & W7 use the possessive noun ‘our’ to gain collective membership, sense of togetherness & shared responsibility for visibility by establishing an objective to support young learners for the betterment of country and development of university programs according to needs of the country respectively. In W9, Urdu transcript is used for visibility to promote national language at official level. Urdu is Pakistan’s national language but it is rarely used in other educational websites.

Online collective Identity of unity: Running parallel with national spirit is the online collective identity of unity. The messages of unity are promulgated implicitly through the use of pronoun *we* and *our* by the leadership and establishes an online collective identity of unity in and around organization. The purpose of which is to display association and powerful teamwork system of the university. [Sanyal and Hisam \(2018\)](#) describes the teamwork plays a significant role in the success of an organization. An organization where there is no association and agreement among its members eventually fails to provide better opportunities and establish itself as a reliable institution.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the seven websites (W1, W3, W5, W6, W7, W8 and W9) reveal that the linguistic texts are written in the similar manner and carefully directed towards the audience including staff members, stakeholders, funding resources but mist preeminently towards potential students. The texts are written n short conversational style but encoded with ideological messages. The discourse in the texts is a mix

of informational and promotional discourse stipulating hierarchical reputation of the university through various indicators such as advanced research programs in multiple academic disciplines, international links, and ranking of the university as seen in (W5, W6, W7, W8 and W9) but rarely mentioning the core purpose of higher education. Much of the discourse is centered on social efficiency and mobility disregarding future outcomes such as public engagement, equal access or citizens' trainings.

The texts equate academic excellence with marketing strategies to attract potential students and qualified teachers. The use of declarative mood in messages shows that the texts maintain high prestige of the institution and present it as most desirable choice for future endeavors. Words like 'reputation', 'prestigious', 'top class', 'world class', 'unique destination', 'leading public research university' arouses a response of credibility, and trustworthiness from the audiences. The common entities singled out in texts which contribute to the online identity construction of the universities include aims and commitments, research based education, expert teaching staff, motivation and support for teachers and students and shared goal to expand national economy. The discourse revealed that the higher education is presented as a commodity via mentions of resources, infrastructure etc in the official website of these universities. Such representation diverts the reader's attention to matters which reduce the actual concern of higher education institution which has a social commitment to impart high quality teaching and research facilities at all social levels and hence exploiting the digital affordance of visibility. The provision of such information, using specific linguistic choices increases visibility in virtual space globally. In this way, self-representation of universities in virtual space seems like a quest which is accomplished by the use of specific linguistic choices by the leadership.

Linguistic strategies such as lexicalization gains readers' attention and keep them occupied with the text. Moreover, the words have power when they are used appropriately within a specific context and by a person of authority. The use of modal verbs *can* and *will* in W1, W3, W6, W7, W8 and W9 and positive vocabulary which develops an association with the reader to used to provide assurance about their future and the reputation of the university. The words communicated in the texts are undoubtedly powerful and may influence the audiences.

Digital affordance of anonymity is exploited by the leadership and creates a friendly and sincere impression of the university. It is achieved through the use of nominalization creating an impersonal tone, eliminating participants and emphasizing the action instead of the doers ([Khamesian, 2015](#)). Use of nominalization creates detachment and objectivity and makes the text appear formal. As a result, the unbiased and prestigious position of the leadership is highlighted which increases the credibility of the presented information ([Prasithrathsint, 2014](#)). The use of nominalization increases anonymity and motivates each member of group for a shared objective thus shaping a collective online identity in and around organization. It website also provides a platform for the leadership for power play to display their superiority, dominance, prestige and high status in and around organization. The concealment of leadership's individual identity helps them become anonymous to speak on behalf of the university when a future goal or responsibility of the institution is ascribed thus shaping an alternative virtual self in and around organization. Digital affordance of being visible is exploited by the texts because the statements, thoughts and information cannot be argued in virtual space. A lot of information about the institution is given to a wider audience which might not be possible in a face to face interaction. Moreover, the information shared cannot be challenged or acknowledged by the audience Hence, it constructs individual and collective online identities in virtual space.

The use of personal pronoun *I* in the texts of W1, W2, W3 W7, W8 and W9 personalizes the text and develops an association with the reader. The reader gets an impression as if the leadership is communication with him directly. The use of inclusive pronouns, *we* and *our*, show solidarity among the faculty members, students and the leadership. Representation of erudite faculty members and their collaborative research activities with students, active participation of students in different areas, motivation and support offered for students, highlights the student centered approach of the universities which dissociate the traditional concept of rigidity in higher education system of Pakistan. Such self-representation of the universities in virtual space creates a collective identity of the institution where all the members are united for a common shared determination and objective. The leadership purposely uses vigorous statements to inspire and connect each group member. As a result, a collective online identity is regularized in and around organization.

The discourses further show the commercialization of education which has revolutionized the traditional concept of education. Commercialization of education refers to the idea of putting more

emphasis on the market trends in education and making it a profitable business. The emphasis on research based education, employment opportunities and mission to raise national economy constructs an entrepreneurial identity of the universities (Saichaie & Morphew, 2014) in virtual space. “The entrepreneurial university integrates economic development into the university as an academic function along with teaching and research” (Etzkowitz, 1998, p.833). Such discourses show the quest of the institutions to present themselves as superior than other competitor institutions in virtual space. Another important aspect of the analysis is that the texts lack diversity in terms of ethnicities and race. The texts are typically directed towards the male gender.

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