

I Post Therefore I Am! Construction of Gendered Identities in Facebook Communication of Pakistani Male and Female Users

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Abstract : In Pakistan, over the past decade, the notion of what counts as a true 'masculine and feminine' behaviour has become more complicated with the inspection of social media. Given its strong religious and socio-cultural norms, patriarchal values are entrenched in the local and cultural traditions of the Pakistani society and regulate the social value of gender. However, the increasing use of internet among Pakistani men and women, especially in the form of social media uses by the youth, is increasingly becoming disruptive and challenging to the strict modes of behavioural monitoring and control both at familial and state level. Facebook, being the prime social media communication platform in Pakistan, provide its users a relatively 'safe' place to embrace how they want to be perceived by their audience. Moreover, the availability of an array of semiotic resources (e.g. the videos, audios, visuals and gifs) on Facebook makes it possible for the users to create a virtual identity that allows them to describe themselves in detail. By making use of Multimodal Discourse Analysis, I aimed to investigate how men and women in Pakistan construct their gendered identities multimodally (visually and linguistically) through their Facebook posts and how these semiotic modes are interconnected to communicate specific meanings. In case of the female data, the analysis showed an ambivalence as females were found to be conforming to the existing socio-cultural norms of the society and they were also employing social media platforms to deviate from traditional gendered patterns and to voice their opinions simultaneously. Similarly, the male data highlighted the reproduction of the prevalent cultural models of masculinity. However, there were instances in the data that showed a digression from the standard norms and there is a (re)negotiation of the traditional patriarchal representations.

Keywords : Facebook, Gendered Identities, Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Pakistan

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