Media's Mediating Role: Shaping Feminist Perspectives Among Pakistani Female University Students

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The objective of this study is to examine the impact of media on the perspectives and attitudes of female university students toward feminism. The individuals that took part in the research were university students from Pakistan. The study, employing a correlational research design, explores the multifaceted impact of media on the attitudes of 100 female university students from diverse academic backgrounds. The research method utilizes a non-probability convenience sampling approach to understand the nuanced relationship between feminism, media influence, and educational levels among the participants. Longitudinal data is utilized to illuminate the evolving dynamics shaping the students' perceptions over time. The study not only highlights the media's influence but also accentuates the need for further exploration into coping mechanisms and alternative metrics to comprehensively assess feminism's impact. It advocates for inclusive research methodologies, acknowledging the necessity of diverse sample populations to glean a more holistic understanding of the complex relationship between media portrayal and feminist perspectives among young women in Pakistan.

Keywords: Feminism, Media Portrayal, Educational levels, Coping Mechanism, Media Influence.

Introduction:

In contemporary society, media plays a pivotal role in shaping perspectives and ideologies, especially among the youth. Among the various spheres influenced by media narratives, the perceptions and attitudes of university students toward feminism stand as a critical area of study. This research endeavors to delve into the impact of media on the viewpoints of female university students in Pakistan regarding feminism. With the country's evolving social landscape and the expanding reach of media, understanding how these platforms influence and mediate perceptions of feminism among young women becomes a significant inquiry. The media stands as the swiftest conduit for widespread access to information among the populace. Over the past few decades in Pakistan, significant strides have been witnessed concerning media and women's involvement. The pursuit of employment by both men and women is compartmentalized across distinct tiers. Women, now integral contributors to the global economy, effectively balance their professional careers with familial responsibilities. Despite their successful integration into professional spheres, women encounter several workplace challenges, including discrimination, harassment, and biases. Gender bias within a patriarchal framework perpetuates a dichotomy and imbalance between men and women across various domains, encompassing education, employment, and access to healthcare and job opportunities. In Pakistan, the work environment for women is shaped by two key sets of factors: firstly, social, religious, cultural, and traditional elements, and secondly, constitutional and institutional aspects. Within the context of the former, Pakistan sustains traditional beliefs that restrict women from engaging in economic pursuits. Pakistani women often confront

societal perceptions that confine them to domestic roles, viewing them primarily as homemakers responsible for spousal care and child-rearing. The current study aimed to explore the perspectives of female students attending universities in Pakistan concerning feminism, delving into the role played by media in shaping their attitudes towards this socio-political movement [1]. The empowering ideology of feminism contrasts starkly with the detrimental concept of gender segregation. Initially, gender roles were defined by the capacity to oversee and nurture children, alongside maintaining established long-term objectives [2]. For a considerable period, this concept was widely accepted without encountering significant critique. However, it later underwent meticulous and rigorous examination [3]. The observed phenomenon might be attributed to men more dutifully adhering to their societal roles, thereby marginalizing or undermining women's positions within the broader scope of the feminist movement [4]. The pervasive use of electrical and computer-based technologies has enabled immediate communication, significantly influenced by media. This influence has led to various unintended consequences, exposing significant disparities in social outcomes and quality. In present-day Pakistan, social media, electronic platforms (television, newspapers, radio), and online channels play pivotal roles in disseminating information to the public, wielding substantial influence over their perspectives and cognitive processes [5]. Over the past few decades, the media has played a crucial role in shaping public opinion on numerous political and social matters, particularly emphasizing the experiences of marginalized groups like minorities, women, and children [6]. The corporate media has significantly shaped public discourse on various subjects, including civil liberties, social equity movements, petitions, and more, often framing them with favor, opposition, or even impartiality. It's accurate to say that the media distinctly influences how individuals perceive political matters and current events [7][8].

The emergence of feminism stems from situations where individuals reject obligations or seek favors or recognition solely based on their gender or sexual orientation [9]. Sexual discrepancy often appears in two contexts: social and natural. Natural segregation is rooted in the inherent anatomical differences between genders, while social segregation categorizes individuals based on their sexual orientation and socioeconomic status [10]. Chromosomal and hormonal variations play a role in differentiating between various sexual orientations during the developmental stages of the brain [11]. Sexual orientation disparity encompasses any differentiation, regardless of its feasibility, practicality, or level of societal acceptance [12]. As per a conducted study, women's educational achievements in Pakistan are notably linked to their perception as secondary citizens. Emphasizing diverse academic disciplines and career paths for young men contributes to a wider array of job prospects, creating a gender imbalance. In contrast, young women often receive education focused on language, communication, teaching, and administrative skills. A comparative analysis revealed that female students display an increasing affinity toward feminism and opposition to gender-based discrimination compared to their male peers. The study underscores women's heightened awareness of the gender gap due to restricted opportunities, especially when compared to men. Specifically concentrating on the perspectives on feminism among a cohort of young female college students in Pakistan, the research centers on feminism as a socio-political movement advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment across various domains [13][14][15].

As per the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.), feminism denotes the belief in the equality of the sexes. The aim of this study was to explore the perspectives of female university students in Pakistan regarding feminism, focusing specifically on how the media shapes these viewpoints. Feminism stands as a commendable ideology that opposes gender-based discrimination. Initially, gender roles were established based on managing childcare responsibilities and maintaining systematic organization over extended periods. There were dissenting voices against this concept; however, subsequent to this initial skepticism, it underwent meticulous scrutiny. This phenomenon might be attributed to men adhering more

steadfastly to their prescribed roles while disregarding the traditional roles assigned to women within the broader context of the feminist movement. The advent of electrical and computer-based advancements has enabled instantaneous global communication. The media's influence has been noted to wield various forms of social control and influence over acceptable discourse boundaries [16].

In present-day Pakistan, social media, electronic platforms (television, newspapers, radio), and online channels serve as significant avenues for sharing information with the public, shaping their perspectives and cognitive processes. Over recent decades, the media has made noticeable efforts to influence public opinion on various political and social issues, with a specific focus on marginalized groups like women, children, and ethnic minorities. Corporate media has shaped public discourse on civil liberties, social equity movements, and other topics, presenting viewpoints that align with support, opposition, or neutrality. It's undeniable that the media's influence can distort the public's understanding of political matters and related narratives. Feminism arises when individuals reject their assigned roles or seek privileges based on gender. Sexual discrepancy manifests in two contexts: natural and social. Natural segregation stems from inherent physical differences between genders, while social segregation categorizes individuals based on sexual orientation and socioeconomic status. Disparities in chromosomes and hormones contribute to the differentiation of sexual orientation during mental development. In a broader context, sexual orientation disparity encompasses any noticeable difference, regardless of its accuracy, foundation, or societal endorsement [17].

Feminist hypotheses serve as analytical or anecdotal extensions of feminist theory. This inquiry aims to comprehend the underlying reasons behind an unequal sexual disposition. Despite their importance, the significance of Feminist hypotheses is sometimes overlooked, prompting scholars to note a lack of extensive discussion regarding their value [18]. Feminism stands as a socio-political movement advocating for gender equality and the safeguarding of women's rights. Initially rooted in Western regions, this movement gradually spread throughout local communities, gathering support from various individuals and organizations committed to championing women's rights and addressing their challenges. Tracing back to around 300 BCE, Roman women congregated on Capitoline Hill, obstructing access to the Forum in response to Consul Cato's opposition to repealing laws that restricted women's access to costly goods [7] conducted a study highlighting the evolution of symbols associated with women's activist causes, with each wave representing distinct aspects of these concerns [19]. During the historical period under review, several critical concerns surfaced, notably testimony, working conditions, and educational rights. These issues significantly contributed to the evolution of feminism from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries. The historical timeline began in the United States in 1809 with the establishment of the "Wedded Women Property Law" and extended until the grant of the "Right to Vote" in 1928.

Media:

The media is widely recognized as a catalyst for societal change, capable of captivating and engaging individuals collectively. Before the unregulated surge of feminism, women were largely marginalized and excluded from various spheres of society [20]. The media was also part of this representation. Despite the undeniable importance and necessity of women in society, the prevalent use of female imagery often captures our attention. Pakistan still grapples with challenges in tackling gender disparities, while Western societies have long moved away from this trend, fostering environments that support women's advancement for over a century. A segment of the educated population in Pakistan has gained the knowledge and skills to address biases and discrimination related to limited female representation and diverse sexual orientations [21]. However, there persists a predominant culture that revolves around and prioritizes males, leading to the treatment of women akin to domesticated animals. The dynamic visual portrayal and growing significance of a woman position her as a highly adaptable and indispensable tool

used by the media. Her external appearance is leveraged to facilitate transactions, where the idea of greatness is commodified and assigned a monetary value [22]. In Pakistan, women who publicly exhibit themselves locally, nationally, or globally are often seen as lacking modesty and compromising their inherent qualities. The media serves as the quickest source of information for the general public. Over the past two decades, notable progress has been observed in Pakistan regarding women's involvement in the media sector. The demands placed on individuals involved in business operations are structured across various hierarchical tiers [23]. Women's participation in the global economy is highly significant, with many demonstrating the capacity to effectively balance their professional and familial duties.

Regarding the portrayal of women in the media:

Modern culture provides women with diverse opportunities in multiculturalism and sexuality, expanding their roles. However, it's arguable that this process leads to increased tolerance but also perpetuates stereotypes. Experts acknowledge that conveyed images stem from photographs and view the media as the source of these generalizations. Furthermore, it's argued that specific individuals have been consistently depicted in these images. Photography serves as a medium for individuals to express emotions and communicate thoughts on various issues. [24]. The field of communication has seen remarkable advancements, becoming a powerful force in contemporary society, transcending national boundaries to impact countries like Pakistan and others worldwide. Media content disseminated over time shows a consistent level of steadfastness. With society heavily reliant on media for information that directly affects daily life, its influential nature poses challenges to societal cohesion by significantly influencing cognitive processes among individuals. Mass media played a vital role in aiding local networks by providing information, education, guidance, and entertainment. This concept involves the unification of the world into a single global entity flooded with noteworthy information [25]. In various cultural contexts, effective advertising often employs well-crafted narratives to convey product or service origins. A spectrum of communicators, including visual artists, filmmakers, and fashion enthusiasts, commonly use generalizations to subtly convey their ideas to audiences. Despite their commendable aspects, these generalizations can evoke detrimental perceptions, contributing to negative outcomes for individuals. Notable images wield significant influence over recollections within developed societies, much like other conventional representations. Rather than merely endorsing sex work, a movement surfaced that critiqued the male-dominated societal structure, emphasizing the need for collaborative harmony. This movement played a pivotal role in persuading the general population to adopt incremental societal changes. Gradually, the concept of sexual orientation emerged as an encompassing framework addressing masculinity, feminism, and provocative stances. Key figures in positions of authority facilitated the acknowledgment and advancement of issues related to feminism and masculinity, contributing to their progression. The portrayal of women in media profoundly shapes perceptions, influencing how they're viewed by the wider population, thus impacting societal attitudes. The media's potential to shape individual psychological well-being should not be underestimated.

Perceptions of Feminism Among Female University Students:

Discrepancies in sexual orientation prevail across diverse spheres, eliciting varied responses—positive or negative—toward individuals of differing genders based on personal beliefs. The current investigation scrutinizes the perspectives of female university students concerning feminism. Scholarly inquiry underscores Pakistan's educational system as a significant contributor to the marginalization of women, consequently relegating them to a secondary societal position [26]. There exists a prevailing inclination to encourage young men to pursue a diverse spectrum of academic disciplines, potentially leading to imbalances in job opportunities and gender representation. Conversely, young women often receive instruction in linguistic abilities, verbal communication, academic pursuits, and formal competencies. Multiple

studies suggest that female students generally hold more favorable attitudes toward sexual orientation compared to their male counterparts. Scholars argue that women exhibit heightened awareness of gender imbalances, experiencing inadvertent biases more frequently than men. Research findings indicate a preference among respondents to enroll male offspring in educational institutions, from schools to higher education, in contrast to females. Studies in Turkey revealed a significant proportion of women experiencing segregation compared to a smaller percentage of men reporting such incidents. Furthermore, a substantial 87% of females expressed a preference for same-gender relationships, while only 24% of young males reported similar sentiments regarding sexual orientation. Approximately 50% of college students have encountered prejudice due to sexual orientation. While numerous scholarly inquiries have explored various aspects of feminism, including attitudes and behaviors, few have focused on underdeveloped countries like Pakistan. However, the existing studies have not met the expected standards for delivering comprehensive outcomes. Literature reviews highlight the media's influence on attitudes and actions concerning feminism. This study aims to investigate the impact of media on the attitudes of female college students toward feminism. Understanding young women's perspectives on feminism is crucial as they represent pivotal assets for our future. This study primarily seeks to explore the perspectives and attitudes of female university students in Pakistan toward feminism. Anticipating the potential consequences of rejecting feminism, the study aims to examine the correlation between Pakistani media and the attitudes of female university students toward feminism and explore the media's role as a potential mediator in this context.

College women exhibit a positive correlation in their attitudes toward feminism. It is anticipated that the impact of Pakistani media on the viewpoints of university women regarding feminism will likely undergo moderation. Additionally, educational attainment, particularly the acquisition of advanced degrees such as M. Phil. or MS, demonstrates a positive association with a stronger inclination toward feminist ideologies among women, as opposed to individuals with lower academic achievements such as M.Sc. or BS. Hons [27][28].

Methodology:

Participants:

Sample Selection:

A convenience sampling method was utilized to contact 250 female university students, resulting in 150 responses. Eventually, 100 responses met the research suitability criteria.

Age Range: Encompassed individuals aged 22 to 37.

Inclusion Criteria:

Female students enrolled full-time in universities and have exposure to Pakistani media through various platforms like television, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

Exclusion Criteria:

Male students and female students lack access to any form of media (television, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.).

Variables:

Feminism:

Operationally defined as a socio-political movement advocating for gender equality and dismantling patriarchal structures.

Media:

Operationally described as a communication medium across various platforms such as television, news outlets, Instagram, and Facebook.

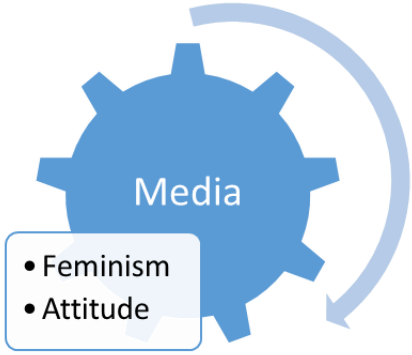

Figure 1: Role of media as a mediator in developing feminism and attitude among females.

Data Collection:

Data Collection Tools:

Utilized surveys including demographic sheets, the Social Networking Platforms Utilization Questionnaire, and the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS) by Spence.

Consent and Ethical Considerations:

Obtained informed consent from participants and followed APA Ethics Code guidelines to ensure confidentiality and protect participant rights and well-being.

Procedure:

Participants were briefed on the study's objectives and requested consent. They completed demographic sheets and questionnaires, requiring approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

Analysis:

Data collected was analyzed using Smart-PLS and SPSS version 22 software.

This methodology adhered to ethical considerations, ensuring participant confidentiality and compliance with ethical codes outlined by the APA. This methodology framed a systematic approach for participant selection, data collection, and ethical considerations to maintain the study's integrity and safeguard the well-being of the involved individuals.

Results and Discussion:

The primary aim of this study was to explore the impact of Pakistani media on the perspectives of feminism among female university students. Additionally, this research delved into the influence of feminism on various attributes while probing the potential moderating effect of academic pursuit. This study scrutinized the relationship between the attitudes of Pakistani female university students towards feminism. The secondary premise examined the link between the perspectives of Pakistani females on feminism and the presence of a statistically significant positive correlation ($p<0.5$) between all predictor variables and these attitudes, a correlation supported by empirical evidence [7]study on women's involvement in news media unveiled a global limitation in the representation of women within media organizations. It revealed that merely 23% of Asian women, 27% in Latin America, and 38% in Western Europe are employed in this field. Aligning with this insight, another study highlighted that women depicted in media endure verbal and physical mistreatment. Emotional harassment, stemming from negative discourse about their personal lives by male colleagues, is a frequent ordeal. Additionally, these women face ridicule, encounter earning discrepancies compared to men, and struggle to secure high-level professional roles due to prevalent gender biases in their local environments.

Table 1: Representation of Women in Media Organizations Globally

Region	Percentage of Women Employed in Media Organizations
Asia	23%
Latin America	27%
Western Europe	38%

Table 2: Media's Impact on Feminist Views From the perspective of Pakistani Female University Students

Research Questions	Responses
Media portrayal influences feminist perspectives among Pakistani female university students.	Almost 68.6% agreed/strongly agreed fewer women are depicted in media compared to men. Nearly 50.5% believed equal opportunities for professional growth are lacking for women in media. Almost 47% felt media often assigns hard assignments to women. Nearly 41.7% agreed leadership roles for women in media are infrequent.
Media-generated attitudes impact feminist perspectives among Pakistani female university students.	Almost 48.9% agreed/strongly agreed media contributes to mental and emotional abuse towards women. Nearly 37.8% agreed media devalues opinions of women, particularly by male representations. Almost 56.9% agreed media fosters teasing and sarcasm towards women.
Social perceptions from media affect feminist perspectives among Pakistani female university students.	Nearly 56.4% agreed women depicted in media lack social respect compared to their male counterparts. Almost 45.6% believed media often portrays women as victims of gender-based biases.

Table 2 represents the perception of female students regarding the impact of media. The survey findings indicate that media portrayal, generated attitudes, and social perceptions from media significantly influence feminist perspectives among Pakistani female university students. These findings underscore the influential role of media in shaping perceptions and suggest the importance of promoting gender equality in media representations to foster more inclusive and empowering perspectives among this demographic.

Discussion:

The global influence of the media on women's perceptions has been strategically leveraged for economic gain, emphasizing profit generation by perpetuating a disparity between an idealized depiction of women and their authentic reality. Scholars exploring women's activism, including traditional structuralism and post-structuralism, have contributed insights into this phenomenon. In the realm of post-structuralist women's activism, a scholar investigated selfhood by exploring the interplay between individual agency and societal influences. According to Weedon, an individual's subjectivity encompasses their conscious and unconscious reflections, personal identity, emotions, and how they interpret their relationship with the broader world, which may include popular media [7] highlighting the symbolic marginalization of women in non-traditional roles and genres within the media, such as soap operas, contributing to their limited presence.

The contention persists that despite the increasing female workforce participation, the media inadequately acknowledges substantial shifts in gender roles, resulting in a lack of diverse female role models. A beneficial approach would involve the media adopting more genuine depictions of women, aligning with evolving societal norms. A prior 2007 study highlighted how media representations of the human body hold political and commercial implications, critiquing societal norms and sometimes exploiting individuals for financial gain. These depictions might inadvertently endorse self-destructive behaviors among young women, evident in the study's findings linking frequent magazine reading to increased body dissatisfaction and irregular eating

habits. Such outcomes significantly impact women's well-being. Other research points to a connection between frequent fashion magazine consumption and heightened idealization of thinness, contributing to weight-related concerns and disordered eating patterns. Exploring the gendered construction of control and personality challenges essentialist assumptions about "women" as a uniform category, as per Weedon, a prominent feminist post-structuralist scholar advocating for a comprehensive subjectivity theory encompassing personal experiences and societal power dynamics.

Recommendations and Conclusion:

In light of the study's findings, several recommendations emerge. Firstly, further research is advised to delve into the lasting impacts of the interventions applied. The study's results highlight a significant correlation between the viewpoints of female university students and the influence of media on their perceptions of feminism. The research involved a sample of university students from Pakistan, totaling 100 individuals chosen through a non-probability convenience sampling method, as indicated by the study's g-power calculator. Employing a correlational research design, various statistical approaches were used to analyze data from female students across different universities in Punjab. The key factors examined included attitudes, the feminist movement, and the role of media as a mediator. The study findings emphasize the pivotal role of Pakistani media in shaping how female university students articulate their views on feminism. Additionally, a noticeable link between students' attitudes and their stance on feminism is evident. Notably, higher levels of education among female university students are associated with a slightly stronger adherence to feminist ideologies compared to those with lower educational achievements. The investigation strives to enhance comprehension regarding the social implications stemming from the rising influence of feminism, aiming to address both its positive impacts on women's empowerment and the potential negative consequences such as incidents of rape, divorce, obscenity, homicide, and other violent offenses. Employing longitudinal data is preferred to thoroughly examine the correlation between feminism and the Pakistani media. Given the vast scope of feminism and the media's pervasive impact, conducting comprehensive research becomes crucial to explore additional dimensions beyond the already acknowledged societal influences. It's vital to devise and acknowledge coping mechanisms that aim to mitigate the repercussions of feminism, ultimately aiming to curb the exacerbation of societal challenges. Future research might consider alternative metrics to evaluate feminism, transcending the limitations of certain survey instruments. To ensure a more comprehensive analysis of feminism concerning various factors, it's recommended that forthcoming iterations of this study involve a more diverse sample population.

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