



RESEARCH PAPER

The Gendering of Women in the Discourse of Politics: A Case of Political Talk Shows in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

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The study explores the position of Pakistani women through an analysis of political media discourse in the backdrop of an emerging discourse on feminism and women empowerment in Pakistan. The undertaken study focused on the frequency and quality of women's participation in the discourse of politics to unveil sociocultural realities concerning women, their place in Pakistani society, and the treatment meted out to them by their male counterparts when they engage in political debates by employing Fairclough's method of critical discourse analysis. Findings indicate a slow yet visible change emerging on the political landscape of Pakistan as more women voice their opinion especially on issues concerning prevailing conditions for women in today's Pakistan. It is also revealed that women continue to be marginalized as indicated by their thin representation in political talk shows and their trivialization by means of cultural frames used to undermine their political standing. Conclusions emphasize the importance of women's political empowerment inevitable for the progress and prosperity of Pakistan. The study is significant as it adds to the developing literature on feminism and women's representation in media.

Introduction

According to the sixth Population and Housing Census held in April 2017, women make 49% of the total population of Pakistan against 51% men with the overall population of the country exceeding 207.7 million (UN women Pakistan, 2017). The country has adopted several international and national commitments to gender equality and women's rights to ensure women's participation and contribution to economic growth and sustainability. However, the female literacy rate in Pakistan is alarmingly low with less than half of the women enjoying the status of 'literate' compared to 71% of men. Women's enrolment in primary, secondary, and tertiary education is also systematically lower than that of men across the country. According to the World Economic Forum report 2020 and 2021, only one-quarter of Pakistani women participate in the labor force compared with 85% of men. Besides, Pakistan ranks 150 with just 4.9% of women working in senior and leadership roles and 98th on

the political gender gap as the number of male cabinet members far exceeds the number of female politicians in federal and provincial cabinets. As for gender equality, Pakistan stood at number 151, third-to-last, in the 2020s and at number 153 fourth-to-last on the 2021 Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2020 & 2021). The growing gender disparity across Pakistan has a reasonable impact on the country's economy and worldwide status. It also contributes to shaping a society where 'gender' determines one's chances and place.

The study examines and discusses political discourse and discursive patterns of participants on political talk shows aired on news channels in Pakistan to explore relations between micro (discourse) and macro (sociocultural realities) structures. This study addresses questions: a) How are women spoken of and spoken to in media? does the discourse show any evidence of gendering? b) What does the women's use of language reveal about their position and power in politics and Pakistani society? Exploratory research design is used to conduct critical discourse analysis – a three-layered method of analysis proposed by Norman Fairclough – of political talk shows selected for the study. The following section reviews literature on the history of women's participation in Pakistan politics since the independence of the country in 1947 until today and their representation in media. The findings section features the analysis of sociocultural practice where micro and macro structures are linked to unveil realities in terms of women's position and power in Pakistani society.

Literature Review

The concept of empowerment is closely related to the idea of feminism that dates back to 1848 and that advocates for equal rights between men and women. All three branches of feminism – Liberalism, Socialism, and Radical feminism – propose equal rights for women targeting different reasons causing women's marginalization and invisibility across the globe. In the context of Pakistan, however, the majority of people are averse to the very spirit of feminism due to its affiliation with 'Western liberty' (Serez, 2017) and, in turn, term it against Islamic teachings. The fact that Islam was the first religion that introduced the idea of equal status and respect for women in Arabia during the chaotic times when boys were valued and girls buried is almost forgotten and compromised (Bhattacharya, 2014). Islam provides women the right to exist, the right to own inheritance (Omar, 2011) as well as holds them responsible for maintaining the survival of the human race in tandem with their male counterparts (Bhattacharya, 2014). Contrary to the teachings of Islam, the status of women declined in Muslim societies over time and Pakistan is no exception.

Women's political empowerment reflects in their representation in national and provincial assemblies. Unlike countries with the greatest number of politically empowered women like Iceland, Norway, and New Zealand (World Economic Forum, 2021), the number of women in the Pakistan National Assembly is far from being equal to men. Although every government reserved seats for women in legislative bodies, the density of women's representation changed every time with the changing of regimes. The first constitution reserved ten seats for women, the second constitution reserved six while the 1973 constitution reversed the number to ten. Women were given the most seats in Parvez Musharraf's regime who, through a legal framework, raised the reserved seats for women up to 19% in the federal and provincial assemblies (Imran & Shahzad, 2019). According to the Council on Foreign Relations, currently, women hold 12% of the ministerial positions and 20% seats in the upper and lower houses of the

national legislature in Pakistan (Vogelstein & Bro, 2021) – A fact that itself speaks for insufficient political empowerment of Pakistani women.

Social Status of Women and Patriarchy

According to (Achtenhagen, 2018), Patriarchy is a multidimensional construct interconnecting various dimensions of women's subordination in the public and private sphere. For Qadir & Riaz (2015), patriarchy refers to male domination in a family headed by a father. Radical feminism terms patriarchy and male dominance as the two main causes of women's trivialization and subordination in key affairs (Imran & Shahzad, 2019) . Unlike the rest of the world that witnessed a shift from public to private patriarchy due to capitalist demand for labor and feminist political activity (Walby, 1990), Pakistan today offers an uneven amalgamation of public and private patriarchy. The patriarchal nature of society strengthens deep-rooted beliefs aimed at confining women and their potential to the walls of their household (Malik & Courtney, 2011). According to Bhattacharya (2014), prevailing patriarchal practices in Pakistan do not let women prosper and stand up for their cause. Moreover, the country's current position on the Global Gender Gap index speaks volumes for the underdeveloped mental and material resources of women caused by their limited access to education (Sanauddin et al., 2016) and resulting in their low social status and sheer dependence on men (Kazmi, 2005). This also becomes a reason for their exclusion from the race for decision-making positions and political representation (Ahmad & Anwar, 2018).

Women in Discourse of Politics

Political talk shows airing on private channels in Pakistan focus on current affairs, feature discussions on the pros and cons of developments on the political scene, and bring about political awareness among the masses. The popularity and impact of political talk shows in Pakistan can be gauged from the fact that hosts of some shows have turned into opinion leaders for many (Fatima & Mumtaz, 2018). These shows also serve as an example of gender disparity as there are fewer female talk show hosts and fewer female participants against a good number of male hosts and participants. Although women work in electronic media, they are often seen performing fewer effective roles mostly behind the camera or else as a newscaster (World Times, 2017). According to the International Media Support organization (IMS), only 4% of all newspapers, radio, and TV reports worldwide challenge gender stereotypes, whereas just 19% of the time, women are used as experts ("Women in Media", 2020). In the context of Pakistan too, most of the media houses prioritize male anchors or news broadcasters because of a general perception in society that men are more intellectually savvy and have more to give, while women are assigned passive roles ("Role of Women in Media", World Times, 2017).

Participation of women in a so-called masculine field inexorably generates issues of power as women's analysis and interpretation of political events often meet criticism and disapproval by their male counterparts. Women are interrupted more, get lesser time to express their viewpoint, and are often dominated by their male participants (Qadir & Riaz, 2015). According to Rahman et al., (2015), the construction of women's identity in media has a direct impact on their effectiveness, and media is responsible for the way their identity is constructed in politics. However, this is also true that women's image constructed by the media is a reflection of society's view of women (Rahman et al., 2015).

Material and Methods

The exploratory research design was used to examine and analyze political discourse for the evidence of gendering and women's position and power in politics and Pakistani society.

Table 1
Research Design

Research Paradigm	Research Design	Method	Data Collection Measures
Interpretivist/ Constructivist	Qualitative/ Exploratory	Inductive/ Critical Discourse Analysis	Political talk shows

In the television industry, prime time refers to the slot enjoying the highest viewership and TRPs. Purposive sampling technique was employed to collect data on well-defined criteria. Rating points of shows aired between September 2020 – February 2021 were obtained to gain objectivity on decisions during data collection. Initial analysis of TRPs revealed the top three shows of every month.

Table 2
Method of analysis

Tools for text analysis	Tools for discursive analysis	Tools for sociocultural analysis
Lexicalization	Intertextuality	Immediate context
Quoting Verbs	(The dialectical-relational approach)	(Women in the discourse of politics)
Representing Social Actors	Presupposition	Wider institutional context
Figurative Language	(The dialectical-relational approach)	(Media and politics as masculine fields)
Transitivity	Ideological squaring	Sociocultural context
Modality	(The socio-cognitive approach)	(Patriarchy, power structures, hegemonic struggle and ideologies)
	Gender relationality	
	(Feminist critical discourse analysis)	
	Connotation	
	(Feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis)	
	Historical dimension	
	(The discourse-historical approach)	

Coding Process and Intercoder Reliability

The current study has followed five steps to ensure an adequate level of reliability. First, the author read transcripts multiple times following the tradition of the verbatim transcription method. At the second ad step, the author has marked certain segments which can either be a single word or a paragraph as a quotation using Atlas.ti9 and assigned codes. In the third step, the author has grouped the assigned codes into different categories. For example, traits demonstrated by female politicians

have been grouped under one category titled ‘Female Politicians’, and ones demonstrated by male politicians have been grouped under ‘Male Politicians’. Groups have also been created according to the three levels of analysis, such as one group for textual analysis, one for discourse practice analysis, and the last one for sociocultural practice analysis. To ensure the correctness and appropriateness of assigned codes, the author has developed a manual codebook containing 28 codes ensuring that the chosen codes are crucial in answering research questions. At the fourth step, the author sent the codebook to two independent coders; one male and one female to include the perspective of both genders. At the fifth step, the author then compared coders’ responses preparing an excel sheet to run Cohen’s Kappa test on SPSS which is a popular method to measure the degree of agreement between the two coders (Jamil, 2020). Cohen’s Kappa statistical value ranges between 0 and 1. In the current study, results calculated by Cohen’s Kappa method indicate a strong and significant agreement between the two coders with 0.744 as the Kappa value.

Table 3
Talk shows for Analysis

	Host & TV channel	Female Participant	Male Participants	Duration
Talk Show 1	Adil Abbasi ARY News	Malika Bukhari	Nabeel Gabol Ataullah Tarar	35min 03 sec
Talk Show 2	Hamid Mir Geo News	Naz Baloch	Farrukh Habib Mian Javed Latif	37min 42 sec
Talk Show 3	Hamid Mir Geo News	Naz Baloch	Faisal Javed Mian Javed Latif	32min 42 sec
Talk Show 4	Kamran Shahid Dunya News	Shehla Raza	Sadaqat Ali Abbasi Mian Javed Latif	35min 51 sec
Talk Show 5	Kamran Shahid Dunya News	Sharmeela Farooqui	Ali Mohd. Khan Tariq Fazal Chaudhry	36min 09 sec
Talk Show 6	Kamran Shahid Dunya News	Malika Bukhari	Mian Javed Latif Irshad Bhatti	37min 30 sec
Talk Show 7	Kamran Shahid Dunya News	Palwasha Khan	Waleed Iqbal Tariq Fazal Chaudhry	36min 05 sec
Talk Show 8	Kamran Shahid Dunya News	Zartaj Gul	Muhammad Zubair	36min 53 sec

Results and Discussion

Investigating language used for women for the evidence of gendering and analyzing their discursive practices as suggestive of their position in a patriarchal context are the chief aims of this study. With the assistance of tools employed at three levels of analysis, language and discursive patterns of participants in political discourse were examined. The findings of the study lend insight into the sociopolitical context, politico-religious context, and sociocultural context as crucial factors in determining discursive patterns of participants and also unveil prevailing realities of Pakistan in terms of gender inequality and representation in media.

Sociopolitical Context

Women's underrepresentation in Parliament reflects their marginalised status in Pakistani politics, as well as their lack of representation on political talk shows.

During the data gathering procedure, it was difficult to identify a programme with an equal number of men and women, demonstrating that women are not trusted to make decisions. One female politician was positioned against two men in the shows collected for analysis, suggesting the lack and marginalisation of female perspectives in political debates. Furthermore, shows with higher viewership had only male hosts, demonstrating a widespread preference for male hosts.

It is also important to note that political discourse in Pakistan revolves around blame game, accusations, glorification of parties by their representatives, and condemnation of the government by opposition representatives. Common man's problems are discussed but scarcely given central position as political victimization consumes most of the air-time. Despite increasing rape and domestic abuse cases, programs designed around such themes are scarce. In the analyzed data, only one program featured a debate on increasing assaults on women focusing more on the political parties' standpoint over punishments given to culprits and concluded without participants developing consensus over the matter. This indicates how the marginalization of women and gender inequality have become mundane issues by the men in power. When a woman is raped in the middle of the night, she is accused for breaking conventional rules that forbid her from going out alone.

Table 4
Sociopolitical Analysis: Women's condition in Pakistan

Excerpt	English Translation
دو ہزار ایک سو پچھن رواں سال کے کیس ہیں۔ ریپ اور گینگ ریپ کے کیسز بقول پنجاب پولیس کے۔	As per Punjab police, there have been 2155 rape and gang rape cases registered during the ongoing year (2020)
مشاہد اللہ خان: یہ حکومت کہاں ہوتی ہے سو جاتی ہے مجھے پتا ہے سوتی نہیں یہ حالت۔ بھنگ میں ہوتی ہے یہ حالت۔ چرس میں ہوتی ہے۔ کوکین کی باتیں کرتے ہیں جو حکومتیں جو ہیں کوکین کے چکر میں ہوں گی، چرس کے چکر میں ہوں گی، بھنگ کے چکر میں ہوں گی، اس حکومت کے اندر لوگوں کی عزتیں محفوظ نہیں رہ سکتیں جناب چیئر مین	Mushahidullah Khan: Where does this government remain? It remains asleep. Or I think it doesn't sleep but remains drugged. It remains under the influence of drug. They talk about cocaine. Governments that waste time in drugs cannot safeguard anyone's honor, Mr. Chairman.

Politico-religious Context

Religion plays a paramount role in the lives of Pakistanis. It is considered as a guiding force contributing to shaping the mass perception of political and social matters. Political debates aired on the mediated platform are replete with instances where participants quote religion and holy verses to find validation for their argument. Citing religious sources, on the other hand, does not imply that you agree with religious doctrines. The findings point to some serious inconsistencies in a society that clings to religion while contradicting its fundamental core. Talk shows participants cite religion when discussing politicians' unjust behavior, the necessity for reform in a Muslim culture, and the rise in rape cases across the country.

When political representatives promise to deliver an ideal state, they refer to Riyasat-e-Medinah (the State of Madinah) – an ideal state established by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) after he migrated from Mecca to Madinah to spend the later years of his life. Madinah gained a reputation for remarkable justice,

brotherhood, and governance during the leadership years of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). A lofty pledge to change Pakistan into an ideal state akin to Madinah should have included deliverance along the same lines, but this isn't the case. This also demonstrates how religious themes are utilized as a means of gaining votes and widespread support. Because of the low literacy rate and widespread poverty, the majority of countrymen are oblivious to religious manipulation by their chosen representatives.

Table 5
Politico-religious Context Analysis

Excerpt	English Translation
ہم نے اوپر اپنے سروں کے اوپر انٹرنیشنل ہیومن رائٹس آرگنائزیشنز اپنے سروں پر سوار کر دی ہیں ہمیں یہ فکر تو ضرور ہے وہ کیا سوچیں گے یہ فکر نہیں ہے کہ اوپر جو بیٹھا ہے وہ کیا سوچے گا وہ کیا کہتا ہے اس نے کلینر لی آپ کو بتا دیا ہے پیار آپ کو اللہ تعالیٰ نے کلینر ڈائریکشن بتائی ہے کیوں ہم اس کو نہیں سمجھتے ہیں	We are overly concerned about the reaction of international human rights organizations. We are worried about what they will think instead of worrying about what He (Allah) will think. He has given us a clear direction in such matters. Why don't we understand that?
پیغام آیا سر عام پھانسی کا۔ ریپ کے لئے ویسے ہی پھانسی کا جرم ہے ضیاء الحق کے دور میں یہ سر عام پھانسی کی روایت شروع کی گئی سر عام پھانسیوں سے کیا ہوا ہے / کبھی معاشری میں جرائم کم ہوئے ہیں بالکل نہیں بلکہ ساری دنیا میں بڑھیں جہاں جہاں بھی ہوا ہے۔	The message came in favor of public hangings which is a prescribed punishment in rape cases. This trend started in Zia's regime. But what good have we achieved out of that? Did it help in reducing crimes? absolutely not. Rather it led to an increase in crime rate wherever the death penalty was executed.

Sociocultural Context

Sociopolitical and politico-religious contexts constitute important sociocultural realities drawing our attention to the patriarchal culture prevailing in the country. As discussed in the introductory section, Pakistan is a patriarchal context where women enjoy limited access to the positions of power. This deep-rooted patriarchy manifests in women's language when they engage in the discourse of politics. Discussion on socio-cultural context has been divided into the discourse of patriarchy and the discourse of empowerment to include negative and positive trends for women participating in political debates.

Discourse of Patriarchy

The textual analysis reflects that the language used by men in political talk shows demonstrates a significant socio-cultural reality that allows men to speak highly informal and derogatory expressions at a platform where they are responsible to represent their cultural, religious, and political affiliation. This indicates how societal expectations are more flexible for men than women existing in the same space and participating in the same discourse as men's equal.

Findings also indicate how time given to female politicians in political debates becomes suggestive of their marginalization and male dominance (See Table 3.3), confirming an age-old belief that considers news business as essentially masculine (Ross, 2014). Female politicians more senior to their male counterparts were given

either the second or the last turn, also lesser time to speak than their male counterparts. Women's invisibility in the discourse of politics is gauged through the frequency of their participation in political talk shows. Unlike male politicians who dominate political discourse, fewer women are participating in political talk shows. All eight shows included in the data had only one female politician against two male politicians and a male host. During the data collection process, author came across some talk shows enjoying the highest rating points but lacking female representation as all participants including the host were men. Talking about the gendering of women in the news media, Donkor (2016) quotes a study conducted on women's invisibility in print media that argues how media mirrors society by featuring fewer women on front pages as there are fewer women in power. Women's underrepresentation in news media hints at the prevailing patriarchal practices in Pakistan that do not allow women to pursue a career in politics or participate in political debates. This is in accordance with the findings previously presented by feminist researchers claiming that a lack of women as news experts suggests a lack of authoritative female voices in the public sphere (Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2018) leading to the absence of women in serious news content (Donkor, 2016).

Haraldsson and Wängnerud (2018) explain the possible reason for women's invisibility in the news media which includes an issue of supply and demand, where supply refers to women's willingness to enter politics. However, they also state numerous factors affecting women's willingness including male-centered political atmosphere, women's lack of confidence in their eligibility, political parties' unwillingness to put female candidates forward in viable positions, and media sexism that strengthens the glass ceiling for female politicians and results in their thin participation in politics (Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2018). The findings of their study also revealed a positive correlation between women's willingness to enter politics and the share of women in parliament.

Table 6
Profile of Female Politicians

	Name	Political Affiliation	Total Time	Air-time consumed
1.	Malika Bukhari	MNA – Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf	35min 3sec 37min 30sec	9min 51sec 7min 20sec
2.	Naz Baloch	MNA – Pakistan People's Party	37min 42sec 32min 42sec	6min 12sec 5min 29sec
3.	Shehla Raza	MPA – Pakistan People's Party	35min 51sec	5min 5sec
4.	Sharmeela Farooqui	MPA – Pakistan People's Party	36 min 09 sec	5 min 19 sec
5.	Zartaj Gul	MNA – Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf	36min 53sec	12min 30 sec
6.	Palwasha Khan	Senator – Pakistan People's Party	36min 5sec	6min 47sec

Habiba et al (2016) define patriarchy as a system of power and control that prevails through various means. Although the scope of the study was to investigate the language used for women for the evidence of gendering, there were instances noted when female politicians gendered their fellow female politician by means of cultural frames. This brings us to acknowledge the notion of neopatriarchy as one of the ways

through which women contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchy. The concept of neopatriarchy was initially discussed concerning women's suppression at the household level (Habiba et al., 2016) but its impact can now be seen on the political landscape of Pakistan. Results reveal women trivializing their fellow female politicians by employing cultural frames demonstrating how neopatriarchy operates through women but is supervised by men in a sociopolitical context. This also reveals how the inclusion of women in the parliament strengthens well-placed men rather than strengthening women's position in politics (Zakar et al., 2018) and how politicians themselves instead of media contribute to the gendering of women in the discourse of politics.

Discourse of Empowerment

Patriarchy and empowerment are considered contradictory as one looks to marginalize women and the other grants them their basic rights. Appearing on television already implicates empowerment in a conservative context like Pakistan, also suggested by female politicians with a sound political background and privileged social standing unlike the majority of Pakistani women struggling for empowerment. What we investigated here is the treatment meted out to these empowered women by their male counterparts. Findings reveal instances where women give signs of empowerment despite their marginalization in parliament and political debates. Shows collected for analysis featured some female politicians with experience, exposure, and political acumen whose contribution to political debates was as good as that of their male counterparts. They enthused authority and confidence demonstrating their grip on the subject under discussion and were also appreciated by men for their valuable input.

According to Jamil (2020), women in Pakistan face harassment, sexual abuse, and gender discrimination in their personal and professional lives which manifest into the declining position of Pakistan on the Global Gender Gap Index. However, this cannot be generalized to all women if Postcolonial feminist theory is taken into consideration. Unlike Western feminism that considers Third World women as a monolithic entity marred by poverty, illiteracy, and marginalization, Postcolonial feminist theory denounces homogenization of women based on context, needs, and experiences. Mohantay (1988, 2004) as cited in Jamil (2020) argues that a Third World woman may not necessarily be oppressed if she belongs to an educated and well-off background. This notion is reaffirmed by Zakar et al (2018) who argue the importance of a strong socioeconomic status and political background for women to overcome cultural barriers and enter into formal politics.

Pakistani women are a diverse group of individuals divided by factors such as education, social well-being, socio-economic background, race, privilege, and media presence. Jamil (2020) argues that any study on gender discrimination and sexual violence must consider the context in which women operate to objectively analyze issues they face in their immediate social, political and cultural environment. This holds true for the current study as female politicians especially the ones with experience appear to be confident, authoritative, well-spoken, and empowered in political debates unlike a great number of Pakistani women who are marginalized, oppressed, and trivialized in their respective contexts.

Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the gendering of women and their position and power in a patriarchal context like Pakistan by employing critical discourse analysis as a method and methodology for the study. A critical analysis of discourse at three levels – textual, discourse practice, sociocultural practice – did not show overwhelming evidence of gendering in terms of language. However, there were evidences to suggest an overpowering presence of patriarchy leading to a marginalized status of women in the country. Participation of female politicians in political debates should be seen as a silver lining signaling a developing discourse of empowerment in support of Pakistani women. However, gender equality still seems a far-fetched notion as women working in politics continue to strengthen men in the political sphere instead of strengthening their own social and political standing. The current study reaffirms women's contribution to the perpetuation of patriarchal structures and puts some onus on female politicians also for deprecating the overall status of women in the country despite their privileged social and political status.

The current study also acknowledges the importance of media in representing society and social realities. Particularly in Pakistan, the inclusion of women in political debates and discourse on the marginalization of women became possible only after the media industry evolved and developed a narrative in support of women's participation in crucial affairs. However, media needs to realize that it not only mirrors reality but can also affect it by showing what is needed, by featuring more women in serious content, by putting an end to the objectification of women, and by joining hands with ones working to challenge deep-seated patriarchy in key spheres of society.

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