

# Assessing the Influence of Social Media on Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women: A Mixed-Methods Approach

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## Abstract

*The study presents four pivotal inquiries to furnish extensive insights into how social media influences women's attitudes toward violence against women. The survey's design enables the gathering of quantitative information directly from participants, permitting statistical analysis to unveil patterns, trends, and associations within the data. The survey instrument encompasses both closed-ended and open-ended queries, capturing quantitative and qualitative data to yield standardized responses while allowing participants to express detailed viewpoints. The results of this investigation demonstrate that social media plays a substantial role in influencing women's attitudes regarding violence against women. Social media's interactive and visually engaging attributes facilitate the dissemination of awareness and equip women with practical strategies for addressing violence, encouraging advocacy and instigating change within their communities. The study suggests that media outlets should actively increase awareness and support effective measures to combat violence. It also emphasizes the importance of conducting long-term research to track the evolution of violence against women and comprehend its underlying causes.*

**Keywords:** Social Media, Attitude towards Violence.

## Introduction

Media, mainly social media, has transformed the world into a global community, serving as a prominent tool and the primary means of one-way communication. As a result, it is widely utilized for various purposes, spanning social, political, and developmental domains. Its capacity to shape the attitudes and behaviors of the general public and its influential role in shaping national and international policies make it a crucial element in contemporary society. Additionally, social media contributes significantly to the personal development of its users. It fosters increased sociability among people in both urban and rural areas of Pakistan, exposing them to the various activities and content available on social media platforms (Yahya, 2017).

The term "social media" is defined as a communication method that operates on a large scale, engaging and involving virtually everyone in a society to varying degrees. Its widespread influence on socialization cannot be underestimated. Socialization, in this context, refers to acquiring interpersonal and interactional skills that align with the values of one's society

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(Zombie, 2017). Violence against women is a prevalent problem in numerous societies and countries. Traditional media has historically played a substantial role in influencing perceptions and attitudes regarding gender-based violence. However, with the emergence of social media, it has become imperative to assess its influence on attitudes towards violence against women, with a specific focus on the perspectives of women (Gul, 2015).

The connection between new media and violence against women is complicated. In recent times, the proliferation of digital technology has facilitated the global dissemination of information and communication, which has yielded both favorable and adverse consequences for women, especially concerning violence. On one side, new media has offered women a platform to voice their concerns about violence and to promote awareness of the issue. Conversely, it has also been exploited as a means to perpetrate violence against women, with wrongdoers utilizing digital technology for harassment, stalking, and even physical violence (Fargal, 2001).

### **Literature Review**

Research outcomes investigating the overall impacts of digital media, notably social media, on various demographic groups have exhibited diverse findings. Although there has been a surge in studies associating social networks with the experiences of young individuals, there has been a decline in research investigating the ramifications of social networks on women.

The connection between new media and violence against women is intricate. With the advent of digital technology in recent years, the dissemination of information and communication has expanded globally, resulting in both favorable and unfavorable consequences for women, especially in the context of violence. On a positive note, new media has offered women a platform to voice their experiences with violence and to promote awareness of the issue. Conversely, it has also become a tool for perpetrating violence against women, as offenders employ digital technology for activities such as harassment, stalking, and even physical acts of violence (Felson, 2006).

Research has demonstrated that the advent of communication technology has opened up new avenues for women to access information and entertainment through various media outlets. An investigation conducted by Abdul Karim in 2022 revealed that citizen journalism, facilitated by social media, has played a significant role in increasing awareness of women's rights issues and the fight against all forms of violence targeting women. Moreover, citizen journalism is the preferred source of information regarding social issues. The study, therefore, recommended the adherence to ethical and professional standards when publishing content related to violence against women, with due consideration for the psychological well-being of victims and the potential negative consequences of publicizing their experiences.

In a separate study conducted by Abdul Rahman in 2021, the exposure of university students to news about crimes against women on social media and its impact on their mental well-being was explored. The study found that electronic harassment, violence, and humiliation were the most commonly reported crimes against women disseminated through social media. In contrast, sexual crimes, such as the distribution of victims' images and humiliation, were less frequent. The study's findings indicated that exposure to such news on social media can hurt the mental well-being of university students. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the psychological state of the victims and to avoid any negative repercussions on them or their public exposure. Top of Form

A study conducted by Karam Al-Din in 2021 shed light on the media's coverage of various issues related to violence against women. The study revealed that female genital mutilation received the highest media coverage, accounting for 43.6% of the attention, followed by early

marriage at 27.2%. However, it was observed that other forms of violence against women, such as workplace violence or the denial of access to education, received relatively little media attention. In terms of the tone of coverage, media reporting on violence against women was predominantly positive, constituting 49.9%, although negative coverage accounted for 38.8%. In a study conducted by Geroulanos in 2017, an emphasis was placed on the imperative for societal change in response to the effects of violence against women. It was proposed that this change be facilitated by developing media resources that could offer materials for social intervention services to address the consequences of violence.

A study conducted by Simons and Morgan (2018) examined the prevalence of violence against rural women in the Dakhiliyah Governorate. The study identified a total of 5573 cases of violence affecting rural women, with physical violence being the most common form, accounting for 41.1% of all cases. Psychological violence followed, constituting 26.1% of the cases. Sexual violence was the least frequently reported form, making up 6.06% of all cases, while social violence accounted for 12.4% and economic violence for 14.3%. In a separate study conducted by Jaleel Ibrahim Abdulaziz in 2021, the repercussions of violence against women, particularly within the family context, were explored. This study underscored the prominent role of social violence in such cases. Most individuals affected by family conflicts experience psychological problems, including speech and language disorders, communication difficulties, attention deficits, poor concentration, heightened brain activity, seizures, and hyperactivity. Additionally, most of the cases were exposed to various forms of family violence, including physical, psychological, and verbal abuse.

As per Ahmed's research (2014), domestic violence is a global issue affecting approximately 20% of the world's population. This problem is closely associated with intricate mental health challenges, which can make it difficult to engage clients effectively in therapy. Ali and Khan's study in 2007 emphasized the substantial hurdles that social workers encounter when addressing domestic violence and poverty. Notably, low-income women who experience mistreatment and have limited resources face significant obstacles in seeking help. Moreover, Noor's research in 2004 highlighted the long-lasting negative consequences of childhood exposure to domestic violence, impacting social, emotional, and educational outcomes. This underscores the need for teacher training and improved protocols and policies to support affected students.

Regarding gender-based violence against women, there is a prevailing sense of insecurity felt by girls and women who hesitate to disclose their experiences of harassment to their families out of fear of blame and moral questioning. This societal tendency to place blame and responsibility solely on girls and women for their actions and the actions of others represents a profound form of oppression. Top of Form Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize the increased vulnerability of girls to gender-based violence as they enter puberty. Global statistics from 2016 indicate that a staggering 9 million girls aged 15 to 19 were coerced into participating in sexual activities during that year. What is even more alarming is that nearly 9 out of 10 adolescent girls reported that this was their initial experience of forced sexual encounters during their adolescence. This violence emanated from various sources, including individuals known to the victims, such as friends, classmates, and relatives, as well as strangers (Zubair, 2020).

The study of Muneer (2017) drew upon insights from prior studies, which aided in several aspects of the research. Firstly, these previous studies helped identify the four types of violence, as reflected in the research findings. Additionally, they played a crucial role in formulating the research problem, specifying the study's objectives, and providing a foundation for agreement and disagreement with the study's results. The primary focus of the study was on the issue of

violence against women, which is a global concern extensively covered by various media outlets. These reports have examined different forms of violence against women, encompassing physical, psychological, sexual, and economic dimensions. Consequently, the central research problem addressed by Muneer (2017) revolved around investigating the role of social media platforms and their influence on shaping the attitudes of Arab society towards violence against women.

The evolution of media studies has traversed three significant stages, as outlined in the work of Klapper (1960). Initially, the first stage strongly emphasized the powerful impact of media. Subsequently, the second stage questioned these presumed effects. Finally, in the third stage, there was a return to the notion of media's substantial influence. Klapper argued that media seldom exert direct effects in isolation; their impact is intertwined with various social and psychological factors, including an individual's social status, affiliation with reference groups, and their existing attitudes and beliefs. Klapper's perspective suggests that attributing direct effects to media is only plausible in the case of individuals predisposed to aggression prior to media exposure. Consequently, from his viewpoint, television and other media should be regarded as just one of many factors influencing individuals and potentially contributing to violent behavior (Klapper, 1960).

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is based on the concept of Reinforcement Theory. At its core, this theory posits that media messages can strengthen specific patterns of behaviour that individuals already possess and can further entrench these behaviours when exposed to such messages. Moreover, it suggests that exposure to violent media content can potentially lead to increased levels of violence and aggressive conduct, particularly in individuals who already harbour a predisposition towards accepting violence as a norm. In this context, the reinforcing factors identified by the researcher encompass individual cultural norms and values, societal roles, personal characteristics and differences, the influence of family and peer groups, and the beliefs instilled by the social environments in which individuals have grown up. The overarching function of media within this framework is to augment existing beliefs, whether positively or negatively (McLuhan, 1960).

### **Problem Statement**

Violence against women is a widespread concern in various societies, including those in Asia. Traditional media has played a pivotal role in shaping perceptions regarding gender-based violence. However, with the surge of social media, there is a compelling need to investigate its effects on attitudes towards violence against women, particularly from the standpoint of women themselves. This study seeks to assess how social media influences attitudes towards violence against women, taking into account the distinctive cultural milieu and the prevalence of social media usage in Asian communities. By delving into the impact of social media on attitudes, this research endeavours to contribute to a deeper comprehension of the role that digital platforms play in addressing and combatting violence against women, specifically within the context of Punjab, Pakistan, and similar Asian societies.

### **Hypothesis of Study**

The primary hypothesis of the study aims to investigate how women's exposure to social media impacts their perceptions of violence across its four distinct levels (physical violence, psychological violence, economic violence, and Sexual Violence).

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study aims to assess the influence of exposure to four distinct types of violence (physical, psychological, economic, and gender-based) via social media. It also seeks to establish a connection between the frequency and depth of exposure to social media platforms and the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses of women about their roles in domestic violence.

### **Methodology**

#### **Study Design and Instrument Used**

The research methodology utilized in this study was a mixed-methods approach, combining a survey and a thorough literature review. The survey was crafted to obtain firsthand data from a sample group representing the intended research population. Simultaneously, the literature review involved a comprehensive exploration and assessment of existing scholarly materials pertinent to the research subject. The survey design was instrumental in procuring quantitative data directly from participants via a structured questionnaire. This approach allowed for the acquisition of precise information about the research goals, facilitating statistical analysis to reveal patterns, trends, and correlations within the data. The survey instrument was meticulously crafted, considering the research queries and aims. It featured a blend of closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture quantitative and qualitative data. Closed-ended questions offered predefined response choices, ensuring uniformity in data gathering, while open-ended questions provided an avenue for participants to furnish comprehensive insights and viewpoints. The survey yielded primary data directly from participants, whereas the literature review was the backbone of the study's theoretical framework and bolstered the interpretation of the results. This amalgamated methodology engendered a more robust comprehension of the research subject, heightened the credibility of the findings, and augmented the study's overall depth and rigour. Closed-ended questions presented participants with predefined response options, such as multiple-choice items or Likert scale statements. These questions proved highly effective in gathering quantitative data and obtaining measurable responses. They enabled participants to express their preferences, opinions, or levels of agreement or disagreement concerning various statements or topics.

#### **Population and Sample**

The study sample comprised women aged between 18 and 45 from the targeted population, and the sample was drawn from social media sites. A simple random sample of 250 was selected from the large sample size with an interest in women's issues. The sample was 45% aged 25 to less than 35 years old, 35% aged 18 to less than 25 years old, and 20% aged 35 to less than 45 years old. 50% had a university degree, 25% were in university education, 15% had a higher education qualification, and 10% had a lower-than-average qualification.

#### **Data Collection**

This study's data collection employed a dual approach encompassing quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data were gathered through a survey questionnaire, while qualitative data were obtained through interviews. The survey questionnaire was administered electronically to participants, using online survey platforms or email distribution. This questionnaire featured structured questions that enabled participants to furnish numerical responses, utilize rating scales, or choose from predefined response categories. The survey primarily concentrated on



gathering insights into participants' attitudes concerning violence against women, their interactions with social media, and their perceptions regarding how social media impacts their attitudes and behaviours.

On the other hand, interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data, allowing for in-depth exploration and understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives. It facilitated the collection of quantitative and qualitative information, empowering the researchers to analyze and interpret the data in alignment with the research objectives and effectively address the research questions. This approach facilitated the precise collection of information pertinent to the research objectives and facilitated statistical analysis to unveil patterns, trends, and relationships within the dataset.

### Data Analysis Processes

In this study, various steps were taken in the data analysis process to guarantee the accuracy and dependability of the data. These steps encompassed data cleansing, coding, and data entry. The demographic characteristics of the study participants and important variables were succinctly summarized using descriptive statistics. Furthermore, inferential statistical techniques, such as correlation and regression analyses, were employed to explore connections between variables and to put the research hypotheses to the test. A thematic analysis approach was also utilized to uncover recurring themes and patterns within the qualitative data gathered from interviews and open-ended survey questions. The appropriate statistical software tools were used to conduct these analyses, facilitating efficient data processing. Ultimately, the findings were interpreted within the context of the research objectives and the existing body of literature. The analysis in this study was conducted using SPSS software, and a significance level of 95% confidence was established for all correlation tests and regression equations, meaning a p-value of 0.05 or lower was considered statistically significant. The mean was utilized alongside other metrics like simple and double repetitions, the median, and the simple regression coefficient to measure central tendencies.

### Results

**Table 1: Evaluation of the Study Sample: Role of Social Media Sites in Addressing Four Types of Violence against Women**

Types of Violence	Statement	Percentage	The General Weight of Violence
Physical Violence	Carry out an awareness role to confront physical violence.	75	70
	Stimulating the interest of policy makers to confront this violence	74	
	Providing women with legal advice and expertise to confront violence	72	
	Contributing websites to restrict physical violence and confront it	70	
	Providing psychological assistance to women to confront the psychological effects of violence	69	
	Forming negative attitudes of the public towards physical violence	60	

Psychological Violence	Psychological assistance to support women to overcome all types of violence	77	70.3
	Stimulating the interest of mental health professionals to confront this violence	76	
	Monitoring the manifestations of psychological violence and confronting it	75	
	Carrying out an awareness role to confront psychological violence	74.5	
	Stimulating women's fears of an increase in psychological violence incidents	61.5	
	Forming negative attitudes of the public towards psychological violence	58	
Sexual Violence	Raising awareness among policy makers and experts to tackle sexual violence	68.3	74
	Engaging online women's sites to monitor sexual violence	73	
	Success of the sites in providing women with legal assistance to combat violence	71	
	Contributing of the sites to shape negative attitudes in society towards sexual violence	70	
	Monitoring and confronting manifestations of sexual violence	62	
	Raising awareness among policy makers and experts to tackle sexual violence	60	
Economic Violence	Websites contribute to referring many economic violence incidents to judicial and executive authorities and taking decisions about them.	69	62
	Mental health support to help women cope with the psychological effects of violence.	67	
	Websites contribute to forming negative attitudes towards violence in society.	64.5	
	Taking on an awareness role to confront the issue of sexual violence.	64	
	Stimulate the interest of economic and legal decision makers to confront violence	56	
	Monitoring economic violence and raising awareness of women about it	52	
Total Weight of the Impact Scale			67.7

Social media platforms exhibit distinctive strengths when it comes to addressing various forms of violence, as highlighted by their respective degrees of influence:

1. They are particularly effective at raising awareness about confronting violence, earning a substantial impact rating of 67.7 degrees.
2. These platforms provide crucial psychological support to women in their efforts to combat violence, garnering a noteworthy influence rating of 70.3 degrees.

3. They play a significant role in engaging decision-makers, specialists, and experts in violence prevention, with a significance level of 62 degrees.
4. Social media platforms offer specialized consultations and expertise in areas encompassing social, legal, and psychological aspects related to sexual violence, with a considerable impact rating of 70 degrees.
5. They contribute to restricting the manifestations of violence across all forms while raising awareness about it, with an impact rating of 67 degrees.
6. They possess the ability to shape negative attitudes among the general public towards confronting various types of violence, with an impact rating of 67.7 degrees.
7. These findings underscore the multifaceted and pivotal role of social media in addressing and promoting awareness about issues related to violence.

**Table 2: Correlation Between the Exposure of Women to Social Media Sites and Their Attitudes Towards Violence**

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Sig	B Regression Coefficient	Sig	Value F	R2 Correlation Coefficient
Exposure Intensity	Constant	0.000	74.326			
	Physical violence	0.016	0.148	0.016	5.862	0.015
	Constant	0.000	65.081			
	Economic violence	0.037	0.109	0.037	4.400	0.011
	Constant	0.000	66.575		4.786	
	Psychological violence	0.029	0.115	0.029		0.012
	Constant	0.000	40.851			
	Sexual violence	0.000	0.420	0.000	35.044	0.081

The data presented in the previous table indicates a statistically significant correlation between women's exposure to social media sites and their attitudes towards violence, specifically across four distinct levels: physical, economic, psychological, and sexual violence. The coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) reveals that the independent variable, exposure to social media sites, accounts for approximately 1.5%, 1.1%, 1.2%, and 1.8% of the variations in attitudes towards violence at these respective levels. Furthermore, the obtained p-values (0.016, 0.037, 0.029, and 0.00) for the four types of violence all fall below the established significance threshold of 0.05, confirming the significance of the observed effects. The corresponding F-values (5.862, 4.400, 4.786, and 35.044) further underscore the strength of the relationship between exposure to social media sites and attitudes towards violence across these categories.

The findings reveal that, according to the sample's perspective, as the level of interaction with social media sites increases by one unit, there is an associated increase in the development of attitudes towards physical violence (B=0.148), psychological violence (B=0.115), and economic violence (B=0.109). However, it is worth noting that exposure to social media sites did not demonstrate a statistically significant impact on the formation of attitudes towards gender-based violence at a meaningful level (0.322).



The study's results suggest that, as per the sample's perspective, when the frequency of following posts about violence on social media increases by one unit, it corresponds to an increase in attitudes towards gender-based violence by (B=0.420) and an increase in attitudes towards psychological violence by (B=0.296). However, it is essential to note that there was no statistically significant impact of following posts about violence against women on social media on attitudes towards physical violence (at a significance level of 0.870) or economic violence (at a significance level of 0.899).

## Conclusion and Discussion

This study underscores the noteworthy influence of heightened social media engagement in molding attitudes regarding violence against women and in equipping women with practical approaches for addressing this issue. Women have come to recognize the value of leveraging social media platforms because of their interactive and visually captivating attributes, which facilitate disseminating impactful media content to raise awareness about this pressing concern. In the context of this study, Ahmed (2021) underscored the importance of electronic media as a potent tool for instigating a transformative shift in the conventional depiction of women. This transformation can be realized when electronic media is employed effectively and aligned with contemporary developments. The study emphasized the merits of harnessing various electronic journalism techniques, including advanced text, multimedia, and interactive media, particularly on websites. Furthermore, the research emphasized the necessity of adopting a diverse approach to strategies devised by women. This approach should extend beyond the portrayal of conflict and encompass facets such as achievement, excellence, and advocacy for important causes.

Moreover, the study recognized the vital role of media campaigns and awareness programs carried out via electronic platforms in shedding light on the profound impact of social oppression experienced by women. A separate investigation by Abdelwahab (2021) revealed that the public strongly preferred documentary films that empowered women through social media sites. Notably, the issue of violence against women emerged as the most favoured topic among the study participants, underscoring the significance of social media platforms in disseminating media content addressing this critical issue.

In Mohamed's study conducted in 2021, various factors influencing communication when addressing violence against women were brought to light. These factors encompassed technological advancements, the emergence of new media channels, the swift dissemination of news about women, and their attitudes and intellectual perspectives. Furthermore, the research underscored the importance of upholding professional ethics when publishing content related to violence against women.

Research, as exemplified by Anczewska et al. (2013), has underscored the crucial role played by professionals and decision-makers in addressing violence against women. These studies emphasize the active participation of both academics and practitioners within the mental health domain in the development and testing of training programs tailored for women who have encountered domestic violence. Likewise, Gul (2015) has highlighted the significance of collaborative endeavours involving central government, state government, non-governmental organizations, and local authorities in empowering women to combat violence against women. This collaborative approach was particularly evident in the states of Jammu and Kashmir.

## Recommendations

The study puts forth several recommendations. Firstly, it suggests the execution of field studies aimed at exploring the diverse manifestations of violence faced by women across various age groups, encompassing children to adults. Additionally, the study underlines the importance of media outlets taking an active role in fostering awareness about violence against women and advocating for effective strategies to combat it. Furthermore, it proposes the undertaking of long-term research endeavours to monitor the evolution of violence against women over time. This approach would facilitate a comprehensive comprehension of the influence of various factors and the identification of root causes underlying such forms of violence.

Moreover, the study strongly advocates for increased collaboration among a wide array of organizations to elevate awareness regarding women's issues and to collectively address the pervasive problem of violence, all while taking into account the unique needs and challenges faced by women spanning various age groups. Furthermore, the research underscores the significance of fostering cooperative initiatives and partnerships, utilizing both traditional and digital media platforms, to generate a lasting and positive influence on society.

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