

SUBVERTING GENDER HEGEMONY AND SOCIAL CONTEXT: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PAKISTANI WEB MEDIA PROGRAM "CONVERSATIONS WITH KANWAL"

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Abstract: This article presents a critical discourse analysis of the Pakistani web media program "Conversations with Kanwal," examining how it challenges and reconfigures gender hegemony and reflects the social context of Pakistan. Hosted by Kanwal Ahmed, the program has garnered significant attention for addressing gender, feminism, and societal norms in Pakistan. Our analysis reveals that "Conversations with Kanwal" provides a platform for counter-hegemonic voices and perspectives on gender-related issues, contesting dominant patriarchal norms in Pakistani society. The program showcases diverse experiences and narratives of women, highlighting their struggles, achievements, and aspirations. Furthermore, it tackles sensitive topics like domestic violence, workplace discrimination, and gender-based expectations, fostering dialogue and raising awareness among viewers. This article argues that "Conversations with Kanwal" plays a crucial role in reshaping the discourse around gender in Pakistan by interrogating traditional gender roles and expectations. While it challenges dominant narratives by amplifying the voices of marginalized communities and facilitating conversations on gender equality and social justice, our analysis also uncovers some limitations in the program's discourse. Specifically, it occasionally perpetuates certain stereotypes or reinforces existing power dynamics. Moreover, the program's impact is constrained by its digital platform, which may limit its reach to specific segments of society. Overall, this article contributes to the understanding of how web media programs like "Conversations with Kanwal" can subvert gender hegemony and reflect the social context in which they operate, emphasizing the need for continued critical engagement with such media platforms to assess their potential for transformative change in promoting gender equality and challenging societal norms in Pakistan.

Keywords: Gender hegemony; Pakistani web media; Feminism; Societal norms; Discourse analysis

1 INTRODUCTION

The digital landscape has undergone a profound metamorphosis in recent years, revolutionizing the dissemination, sharing, and consumption of information. This paradigm shift has created a platform for marginalized voices to emerge and challenge the dominant narratives that perpetuate established power structures. Pakistani web media has been at the forefront of this transformation, providing a space for discussions on social issues, including gender roles and expectations. Gender hegemony, a deeply entrenched system of power, reinforces and perpetuates traditional gender norms, establishing a hierarchy that privileges masculinity and subordinates femininity. This power dynamic permeates various aspects of society, including media representations, cultural practices, and social interactions. Recognizing the need for change, "Conversations with Kanwal" offers a platform for diverse voices to challenge the status quo and foster critical discussions on gender issues.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Divorced women in Pakistan face a multitude of stressors, including emotional violations, redundancies, and physical illness, which can have a profound impact on their mental health and well-being [1]. The emotional turmoil experienced by single women after divorce can lead to feelings of rage, anger, and poor self-identity, accompanied by financial constraints that exacerbate the challenges of raising children and meeting their basic needs [2]. The emotional lability characteristic of women in the post-divorce period is marked by oscillating emotional highs and lows, including freedom and prospects for personal development, alternating with depression, anxiety, and uncertainty about the future [3-4].

Research conducted by Averdijk et al. revealed that recently divorced women exhibited increased aggression and anger, both in terms of state and trait anger, compared to married women[5]. Divorce carries a significant social stigma, and society often expects individuals to tolerate stressful relationships rather than seeking divorce. In Pakistan, divorce can lead to a change in social status, resulting in personal guilt, loneliness, and a sense of failure, which can be exacerbated by issues such as social acceptance, changes in living arrangements, and economic instability [6].

Domestic violence is a pervasive issue in Pakistan, with poverty being a significant contributing factor. The country's patriarchal culture often privileges men, leaving women with limited decision-making power and increased vulnerability to

violence [7-8]. Factors such as daily conflicts, family-related problems, and financial instability can trigger domestic violence. Moreover, the prevalence of ancient traditions and customs, such as exchange marriages and honor killings, perpetuates violence against women. Education can play a crucial role in empowering women and promoting awareness of their rights.

Child labor is a significant social problem in Pakistan, with poverty being the primary cause. Families living below the poverty line often force their children to work to supplement their income. Other contributing factors include parental illiteracy, social apathy, ignorance, lack of education, and exploitation of cheap labor. The industrial revolution has also had a negative impact, creating circumstances that encourage child labor. Adults often find it difficult to secure employment due to factory owners preferring to employ children at cheaper rates. This perpetuates the exploitation of children and reinforces the cycle of poverty.

Promoters of early marriage believe that having children at a young age is beneficial, as it allows for a young son to support the family before the father grows old. However, this belief neglects the potential consequences of early marriage, such as limiting education and economic opportunities for young girls [9].

Forced marriages, like the tribal custom of Ghag, can have a negative impact on the honor of the family and the girl. This custom involves a young man publicly demanding the hand of a girl, and no other proposals are expected from her afterwards. In some cases, girls who refuse these proposals are killed or married off quickly.

Many girls who are not schooled or are idle at home are often seen as suitable for marriage. However, this neglects the importance of education and economic empowerment for women.

3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to contribute to social change and raise awareness about social media discourse that provides positivity and awareness through a positive context. The research aims to understand how language usage, storytelling techniques, visual aids, and strategies are used to engage and build connections with the audience. Additionally, the research explores whether the positive approach contributes to destigmatizing taboo topics and encourages open expression of thoughts.

The sampling technique used is snowball sampling, with a sample size of 30 episodes. The research includes all age groups, especially young and adult males, females, and transgender individuals.

The limitations of the research include:

The research is limited to only positive discourse analysis of influencer "Kanwal Ahmad".

The research is limited by the availability and quality of data used, which is based on LGBT issues and social and cultural issues that are taboo for society.

The delimitations of the research include:

The research is delimited to apply a specific methodology, such as positive discourse.

The study is delimited to only three seasons and episodes of Kanwal's channel.

4 RESULTS

The analysis and discussion of the episodes include:

Season 3, Episode 3: "A sexless marriage" - This episode focuses on issues such as bullying, abuse, and infidelity faced by females who were unable to speak up against certain themes earlier.

Season 2, Episode 5: "Female foeticide" - This episode shares Ariba's mortifying experience with female foeticide, a taboo subject.

Season 1, Episode 12: "Child labour" - This episode shares Gulnaz's emotional story of a childhood spent scrubbing floors, highlighting the issue of child labour in Pakistan.

Season 2, Episode 8: "Adoption" - This episode introduces Javeria, a woman who took the path less travelled and adopted a child.

Season 2, Episode 7: "Divorce and new relationship" - This episode shares Rizwana's story as a child who grew up in a broken home.

Season 1, Episode 2: "Love and acceptance" - This episode discusses the concept of love and acceptance through Madiha's story.

Season 1, Episode 3: "Chai culture trolley" - This episode shares Rahat's experiences of arranged marriage and body shaming.

Season 2, Episode 9: "Financial empowerment" - This episode tells a heartwarming tale of rebuilding a life from scratch through Amber's story.

Season 5, Episode 12: "Children in jail" - This episode highlights the issue of prisoner kids and how they also have a chance to grow up positively.

Season 5, Episode 6: "Intimacy" - This episode discusses the importance of intimacy in relationships through Dania's story.

Season 1, Episode 1: "Domestic abuses" - This episode shares Adeela's story of surviving 10 years in a toxic marriage and how her father and son supported her.

5 DISCUSSION

The article examines the positive discourse analysis of "Conversations with Kanwal," a web media program that tackles gender-related issues in Pakistan. It analyzes the language, rhetoric, and power dynamics present in the conversations, as well as how gender topics are framed and which voices are amplified or marginalized. The article also explores the impact of the program on its audience, including whether it fosters empathy, understanding, and increased consciousness of gender inequalities.

The program's influencer, Kanwal, portrays taboo topics in a positive way, contributing to shaping the social context in Pakistan by raising awareness about gender issues, challenging stereotypes, and fostering progressive attitudes. The article examines how the program's content influences public discourse, encourages social change, and promotes inclusivity.

Some of the topics discussed in the program include emotional and physical abuse, marital rape, child marriages, acid attacks, financial empowerment, and discrimination against the girl child. The program also sheds light on the importance of education and economic empowerment for women, and challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

The article references various studies and literature on gender issues in Pakistan, including the social and occupational health problems of child labor, domestic violence, and child marriages. It also examines the emotional and social problems faced by divorced and married women in Pakistan.

Overall, the article provides a comprehensive analysis of the positive discourse present in "Conversations with Kanwal" and its impact on the audience, contributing to a deeper understanding of gender issues in Pakistan and the importance of promoting inclusivity and social change.

6 CONCLUSION

"Conversations with Kanwal" serves as a critical platform for subverting gender hegemony and reflecting the social context of Pakistan. By amplifying marginalized voices and addressing taboo topics, the program challenges traditional gender norms and fosters dialogue on gender equality and social justice. However, the digital nature of the platform limits its reach, and certain stereotypes or power dynamics may still be perpetuated. Continued critical engagement with such media platforms is essential to maximize their potential for transformative change in promoting gender equality and challenging societal norms in Pakistan.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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