

Media Representation of Pakistani Transgender People in Newspapers' Blogs Through Corpus Approaches

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Abstract

Media (mis)representation of transgender people has become crucial in shaping the perception, attitude and behaviours of the masses towards them all over the world. Pakistani media is not an exception regarding the portrayal of transgender individuals living in Pakistan. The current study focuses on revealing media representation of Pakistani trans people through blogs published in the country. The current study employs corpus approaches to explore this representation of transgender identity by analysing newspapers' blogs published on the subject (i.e. on transgender people) in Pakistan. The concordance lines of the first ten recurrent content words including transgender, community, people, rights, Pakistan, gender, society, persons, government, and identity from the word list were analysed to explore the themes related to the identity of transgender people in the country. The study found linguistic expressions of transgender apartheid in Pakistan at all levels of the social fabric of the country. However, at the same time discourse of solidarity towards transgender identity was also noticed in the data of the current study. The study proffers an insight to the linguists in general and corpus linguists, in particular, to extend theoretical conceptualization, application of linguistic methods and corpus linguistic techniques to highlight the issues/problems faced by transgender people.

Keywords: Transgender, identity, blogs, corpus, Pakistan.

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Received: 6 June 2024
Accepted: 14 August 2024
Published: 30 September 2024



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1. Introduction

1.1 *Defining sex, gender and transgender*

Trans philosophy (Bettcher, 2019) in transgender studies occupies central position from ontological and epistemological perspectives. There could be two approaches to examine the trans phenomenon including the one focusing on “philosophical perplexity” of trans philosophy and the other is to examine the phenomenon from “the everyday” experiences of the trans individuals. The present study employing the later approach attempting to explore media representation of trans phenomenon in Pakistan. The following definitional explanations under this part i.e. 1.1 to 1.3 are grounded into the second later approach.

The terms sex, gender and transgender are often conflated in our day to day discourse or “mistaken thought to determine one another” (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014, p.1). Though these terms cannot be discussed here in depth because of the existing dispute in definitinal essence of the terms (e.g, Monro, 2005), brief working definitions can be helpful in understanding the identity of the individuals (Transgender people) who have been focused in this study. Sex is a biological identity of an individual categorized as male or female at the time of birth based on the genitalia they are born with (West & Fenstermaker, 1995). Gender, in contrast, is a social construct based on the ideals accepted socially what it is meant to male or female. Mostly, gender is categorized as masculine and feminine which essentially are perceived to be naturally emerged from attributes given to male and female (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Transgender, in contrast to both sex and gender, is an umbrella term referring to people whose gender presentation is different from male/female and masculine/feminine qualities, and identities such as transmen, transwomen, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender LGBT (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014, p.1). And this “identity validation” which surrounds the issues of lives of trans people can be studied in detail in Bettcher (2016, p.407-427). However, the current study consider transgender people as intersex people who may present with male and female characteristics in varied orientations and these individuals are born and grow with intersex genitalia in their initial years of life. They may go under surgery when they join their transgender communities usually called *Khawaja Saras/Hijras* in Pakistan and India (Khan, 2016). The data i.e. blogs of the current study present identity of only these transgender individuals.

1.2 Transgender and identity

Gender identity is generally viewed through social lenses of masculinity and femininity referring to the degree to which individuals see themselves as being masculine or feminine. This view may or may not insinuate what it means to be a man or a woman in a specific community (Stets & Burke, 2000). Male and female are associated with certain behaviours which compel individuals to surrender to the socially constructed orders of society. In other words, the same behaviours are thus perceived as normative of masculinity and femininity (Baker, 2008; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) in socially constructed polarized gendered societies.

In the gender based polarized societies, the existence of the other genders i.e. transgenders are generally not considered equal citizens in some parts of the world including Pakistan (Khan, 2016). For instance, transgender individuals as others are found feeling insecure socially due to such highly bi-gendered polarized societies and face “high levels of mistreatment, harassment, and violence in every aspect of life” (James et al., 2016, p.4). And in the U.S., “transgender people are at a high risk to experience discrimination and violence as a result of their gender identity” (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019, p.2). These individuals are generally grouped into different communities lying on the peripheries of any society. This peripheral status has caused the violation of human rights including education, health, and economy. And all of these issues after being turned into a quite sensitive crisis of identity are not only questioned but sometimes, unfortunately, assumed useless to discuss in some parts of the world manifested with dominant (i.e. man vs woman) gendered discourse only.

Like many other marginalized communities based on religion, race and ethnicity transgender people also mask or conceal their identities under the social pressure of bi-gendered polarized societies' constructs. Transgender individuals who are living with masked identity are usually unknown to their friends, family, and co-workers as transgender people; rather they live with the imposed gender identity i.e. male or female specifically in their initial years of life. They manage their identity as a strategy to maintain or reveal hidden identities in public (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001) and live with the identity imposed on them just to avoid discrimination, misbehaviour, and humiliating discourse associated with them. This attempt of managing identity may range from full concealment to full disclosure of identities depending on context and time. The same identity management phenomenon is noticeable among transgender communities living in some parts of the world (Brooks, 2016) including Pakistan.

The phenomenon of managing identity or self-portrayal that is not conventionally associated with maleness or femaleness becomes sometimes

quite complex. To simplify, transgender is an umbrella term that refers to the people who do not identify with the gender that is socially ascribed to them; rather, they are another gender in terms of their psyche (Kugle, 2013) that may play a vital role in the construction of their identities. The debate on social roles and identities on transgender people is not new. Taparia (2011) explored how an emasculated body takes on various meanings that are embodied in the social roles and identities of hijras through historical perspectives. She concluded that 'it is this socially constructed body and the social roles performed by it that work together to craft the notion of 'self' for the hijra'.

Some of the subcategories of transgender are transman, transwoman, and third gender, and sometimes transsexual people are also counted in this category. They are portrayed as neither male nor female in some cultures including Pakistan and India. In these two countries there are few examples of them enjoying respectable positions because people assume them individuals having divine powers (Jami & Kamal, 2017). On the other hand, ironically, they are observed as beggars on roads and dancers at various ceremonies in Pakistan at least (Tabassum & Jamil, 2014, p.109). In South Asia, they are known as *Hijra* or *Khusra* which are generally perceived by men and women as negatively connotated identity expressions. Our objective in this study is to explore media representation through newspaper blogs published about transgenders living in Pakistan. In addition, in this study, we delve into the *Hijra* or *Khusra* identity of transgender in Pakistan as portrayed by the bloggers. In other words, the study would highlight the issues faced by transgender people in the country.

2. Literature review

Over the last few decades, tremendous work has been conducted in gender studies and transgender studies (Bettcher, 2016, 2019; Stryker & Chaudhry, (2022; Stryker & Blackston, 2023); however, the span of research interest in transgender identity by researchers remains limited, especially in Pakistan. The dominant discourse of men and women is embedded with a lot of language expressions reflecting generally schematized attitudes of the dominant gendered society of males and females towards transgender individuals. Specific expressions are used by masses for transgender individuals to depict their status in society. Sometimes, they are marginalized through discourses generated by men and women. However, certain discourses, which are needed to be examined, are also helpful in raising voices for them to identify their problems and miseries in society. The current study focuses on identifying language expressions, used by Pakistani bloggers, encoded with various attitudes of the masses towards transgender individuals. To achieve this goal we used a corpus-

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driven methodology to explore the representation of the transgender people living in Pakistan.

Social aspects related to transgender individuals such as identity, attitudes, behaviours, violence, and harassment have been addressed in various studies from different perspectives of sociology, psychology, and linguistics (Factor & Rothblum, 2007; Kasemcharoenwong, 2014; Sangganjanavanich & Cavazos, 2010; Törmä, 2018; Zottola, 2018, 2019). These studies have reported various issues of health, education, economy, social status, and psychological states of being of transgender individuals. Some linguistic studies have also been conducted in this regard. For example, Kasemcharoenwong (2014) explored the collocates of transgender in news articles from online news websites and supporting organization websites and found that the term "transgender" collocating with lexical items such as culture, class, race, politics, gender inequality, discrimination, and human rights indicating a representation of transgender individuals as a deprived community of the society. Moreover, transgender are identified with women rather than with men, and the term transgender woman appeared in the texts more frequently than transgender men suggesting how the media is imposing identity on them.

The transgender individuals are marginalized in some parts of the world and they are deprived of their basic human rights even in some developed countries including U.S. (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019). Through the linguistic representation of transgender in the British press Zottola (2018) reported that these communities are misrepresented in the newspapers' headlines, and sometimes they are not given their proper representation in media. The data was collected from newspaper articles published between 2013 and 2015. Moreover, the study discussed the use of two terms transgender and transsexual which were initially used as an adjective and noun. Using transgender as a noun was found not only disapproved rather was considered offensive by the majority of the people belonging to the trans community. The results of the same study further indicate that this trend seems to decrease in the following years, and the use of the two adjectives is erroneously used as synonyms and as nouns. This may also refer to the diachronic changes in the usage of these lexical items. This debate on both terms i.e. transgender and transsexual (noun versus adjectives) shows the prevailing level of sensitization of the trans community with special reference to identity construction and identity dissemination. However, contrary to the findings of Zottola (2018), Törmä (2018) concluded that the lexical item transgender is neither positive nor negative in its use rather it has a neutral semantic prosody. The study enlisted collocates of transgender in different English newspapers. It was found that these semantic prosodies were neutral many times. There was no polarity given to this word in many headlines in newspapers. It means that the lexical item

transgender perceived by the press is neither negative nor positive; the words occur in its vicinity impart/change its meanings.

Hate speech is a mechanism to discriminate, misconduct and humiliate and is frequently employed by dominant authorities within a society to maintain their preferred status. These authorities started using hate speech when racial, ethnic and gender minority groups began to assert rights. For instance, following the Supreme Court's 2020 decision affirming that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act extends protections to non-binary and transgender individuals against workplace and other forms of discrimination, there was a notable increase in the use of hate speech by cisgender individuals against transgender people. This reaction can be interpreted as an attempt by dominant groups to preserve their cultural and social hegemony.

Carlson (2020) highlighted that this kind of behaviour not only creates a divide among different gender groups in society, it also creates a kind of "Us versus Them" dichotomy as if one group feel threatened by the other group in terms of power and rights. It looks like one dominant group feel that their rights are snatched by the other group. Contrary to the notion that equality or equity involves the redistribution of rights from one group to another, it is more accurately conceptualized as the dissolution of the "Us versus Them" dichotomy. Equity should be understood as a process of dismantling these divisive dichotomies and fostering a more inclusive and integrated social framework.

As we know print media plays a crucial role in shaping all the ideologies including ideology related to gender identity. The scholars who worked on media discourse seem to agree that news is socially constructed based on institutional, national, and local ideologies. The reported events not only construct and reflect the society's point of view; it also reveals the "complex and artificial set of criteria of selection" (Fowler, 1991, p.2). Therefore, this debate of language use about trans individuals demands problematization and theorization of such linguistic behaviour under Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) to sensitize society in general and linguists in particular. Trans linguistics in this regard as an emerging framework offers an insight into linguistic ontology and epistemology of "trans practices and subjectivities not as rare exceptions, but as central to any understanding of gender" (Zimman 2020, p.1). This framework deals with language (grammar) and beyond language (discourse) with special reference to trans linguistics.

Trans linguistics (Konnolly, 2021) would serve Transgender individuals who are deprived of basic human rights. Their stance and voice are not given an equal opportunity in society generally which causes marginalization of transgender people. These people face various degrees of violence, aggression, injustice, humiliation, and discrimination in various parts of the world. Trans

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linguists can inform professional counsellors about the problems faced by transgender people. These counsellors subsequently can help trans people in this regard and can change this social stigma of viewing trans individuals as *others*. They can deal with the attitudes, behaviours, and treatment of people with a particular gender and its wide-ranging effects (Sangganjanavanich & Cavazos, 2010).

Sangganjanavanich and Cavazos (2010) have found that trans individuals who usually disclose their gender identities at the workplace suffer for their survival in society; they were fired, demoted, pressured to quit, and were subject to harassment by their co-workers. Moreover, if they resumed the job, they felt pressure to maintain their feminine presentation which is a socially forced adaptation of false and fake identity. The study also found that these people are occasionally unemployed or getting low wages. Factor and Rothblum (2007) explored demographic characteristics, social support, and experiences of violence of transgender adults and their non-transgender siblings. This comparative study revealed that trans and non-trans siblings had grown up in the same families, still, trans people were unable to get the same educational level, jobs, and income as their non-trans siblings. Hence, trans people are a stigmatized group of society.

Furthermore, Factor and Rothblum (*ibid*) reported that trans people face more harassment and discrimination than their non-trans brothers and sisters. In this study, transgender people reported discrimination and harassment from their colleagues, work supervisors, religious leaders, strangers, leaders of the ethnic community, and healthcare providers. They reported also minimum support from the family of origin including siblings. Hence, they felt uncomfortable, detached, and disconnected. This situation is recurrent in families who have fewer resources and a higher rate of violence to trans people. However, there were some exceptions as well where they found some trans people highly qualified and had good jobs. Some of them had partnered relationships and support from their friends as well.

The idea of Cis-heteronormativity, also known as “cisnormative heteronormativity”, is related to heterosexuality legitimizing the naturalness of the relationship of both genders. This concept deals with sex, gender and sexuality in a close association (Marchia & Sommer, 2019). Traditional suppositions of Islamic texts often emphasise gender roles that align with cis-heteronormative points of view, influencing diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. Hidayatullah (2014) identified that many Islamic texts emphasised traditional gender roles and binary understanding of gender. This view supports the idea of cis-heteronormative having specific expectations from men and women based on their gender assigned at the time of their birth. These roles create a great impact on the acceptance of diverse gender identities/roles and

sexual orientation. Heterosexuality is considered as a socially accepted norm. Fidolini (2022) conducted an ethnographic study on young Moroccan immigrants in Europe. The study reveals how people use heteronormativity to reproduce heterosexual identities. These sexually embedded identities create a rift in the acceptance of transgender people in society especially in Islamic countries.

Media representation of transgender people on one hand may be considered a forum for their voice and on the other it is the media that may be a cause of negative representation of transgender people. Pakistani media does not seem exception in this regard. Asghar and Shahzad (2018) have recently found highly negative representations of Pakistani transgender people in print media of Pakistan. This study reveals “repetitive stereotyping of transgender people verging on transphobic ostracization, misgendering and a thoroughgoing stigmatization” (p. 1) by labelling them involved in crimes, prostitution, drug addiction, human trafficking and a few other criminal acts. This study shows that objectification of their sexuality and criminality is foregrounded which subsequently stamps on their identity. Few more studies have also found Pakistani transgender people’s representation issues in print media of Pakistan (Awan 2018; Khalil et al., 2020; Khan, 2017; Parveen & Sadiq, 2018). Their representation through blogs, however, published in Pakistani newspapers has not yet been explored. Blogs in comparison with other part genres of newspapers i.e. editorials, opinion articles, and news stories are more independent in their voice as the authors of the blogs are independent freelance writers and they are likely to exhibit relative freedom of expression in its purity. Therefore, exploring the representation of transgender people’s identities through blogs can equally be insightful. The current study aims to investigate the representation of Pakistani transgender people in the blogs published in Pakistani English newspapers. This study is an attempt to contribute not only to the existing knowledge of transgender studies but the study focuses to exploring the role of corpus-driven methods in discourse studies.

3. Methodology

Media play a significant role in disseminating and creating different ideologies. As Fairclough (2013) observed media discourse having hidden power to exercise depends on systematic tendencies in news reporting and other media activities. Therefore, the current study explores newspaper blogs to find out these tendencies in the forms of various themes related to identity. According to Fairclough (ibid), “a single text on its own is quite insignificant: the effects of media power are cumulative, working through the repetition of

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particular ways of handling causalities and agency". Hence, corpus linguistics provides an opportunity to analyse the repetitions of specific lexical items in a cumulative collection of texts. The analysis of concordances of frequently occurring lexical items provides an opportunity to extract various themes in line with the particular lexeme.

3.1 Data collection

The data for the current study consists of newspaper blogs published by Pakistani writers in a local print media newspaper. The blogs are published in only one newspaper of the country named The Express Tribune, one of Pakistan's mainstream newspapers. This data is part of a larger research project named Pakistan Gender Text (PakGenText) (Shehzad & Zahra, 2019). The data for this study was extracted from the blogs focusing on Transgender people in newspapers. Data was collected from twenty years (2001 to 2020) of published material in the newspaper's blogs. Each blog was scanned to ensure that it dealt with "transgender people" as subject. These newspaper blogs vary in length, ranging from a single to several paragraphs.

3.2 Corpus building

The corpus comprises 42 blogs having 33468 tokens i.e. total number of words including content and functional words both. The word list generated from the corpus contains 6572 unique words (i.e. word types) by using AntConc (Anthony, 2016).

Table. 1. Wordlist of the corpus.

Sr. No	Lexical items	Frequencies
1	Transgender	612
2	Community	250
3	People	239
4	Rights	189
5	Pakistan	188
6	Gender	173
7	Society	167
8	Persons	108
9	Government	105
10	Identity	92

We selected the first ten recurrent content words from the word list including transgender, community, people, rights, Pakistan, gender, society, persons, government, and identity.

3.3 Corpus-driven approach as an analytical framework

After the derivation and selection of the word list, we examined the corpus using concordance analysis that is established functionalities in corpus-driven discourse analysis. The concordance lines were analysed having the search window size of 55. We used a mutual information (MI) score of five. There is no ideal window span for the analysis of concordance lines and collocates which gave the ideal precision and recall. However, adjacent words/collocates help in identifying the context and themes of the occurrences; sometimes we also use the tool of file view to get a deeper understanding of the text and identification of themes. In the final step of identification of themes, we found different themes such as the rights of transgender, commonly held beliefs about the trans community, myths about *hijras*, problems faced by transgender in Pakistan, opportunities to work, and facilities to get an education. We focused on the themes related to the identity of transgender in Pakistan. The mapping of themes requires careful consideration of concordance lines. We analysed concordance lines and extracted themes related to the identity of transgender in Pakistan. Prevalent themes related to the identity of transgender are the marginalized identity of the transgender, *Hijra*, or *Kbusra* Identity, the identity of transgender as dancers, sex workers, and jesters and the religious identity of transgender. Keeping in view the norms of the corpus-driven approach, the themes were extracted without prior assumptions and expectations. It is also worth noticing that most of the blogs were written in the Pakistani context. Hence, this study is also related to the themes considering the identity of transgender in Pakistan.

4. Analysis and discussion

In this section, we report and discuss various issues related to the identity representation of transgender people in the blogs written by Pakistanis. It has been revealed that the bloggers represent Pakistani transgender individuals through typified stereotypes. For example, we have found their representation as socially marginalized people; maltreatment through foregrounding sexuality; the negative representation as sex workers; and the religiously *othered* community. The study found that they are marginalized and subjected to adopt

and adapt a specific identity that is partially/fully laced on them. They served as sex workers, jesters, and dancers; this is an accepted transgender role in Pakistani society as reported by the bloggers. They are also observed as *hijras/khusras* while begging on the roads. Their identity as a Muslim is viewed through the blogs with a cynical attitude. As they are generally not considered a part of the mainstream of society, they also face problems in demonstrating their rights of religious freedom. All of these issues related to the identity of transgender people in Pakistan are discussed in detail in the following subsections.

4.1 Marginalized identity of transgender people in Pakistan

After analyzing the concordance lines generated from the corpus of the selected blogs related to community and transgender, it is observed that transgender people are represented as marginalized/*other* group. These people are not considered as a part of the whole society/community of people rather pronouns like *their* and *them* are used to address trans individuals in the blogs. This type of discourse plays a vital role in the social representation of trans people in Pakistan. A phrase like “*transgender community*” cannot be representative of all transgender people as the nature of their identity is fluid (Jami & Kamal, 2017). Moreover, the word “community” is generally perceived as a group of people living in the minority together with the people in the majority with usually shared goals. And if the goals are not shared with other groups of people in the majority this group of minority may live in exclusion which ultimately may cause marginalization. Such media representation can instil these feelings of seclusion in trans individuals that they are not suitable for noble professions and they are born to live on the margins of society. According to the findings of the current study and few other studies (Tabassum & Jamil, 2014, p. 108) the only two occupations that appear accessible to them are begging and prostitution in the country portraying a negative representation of trans people. According to the blogs' representation, this is the extent to which Pakistani society has marginalized them as gender is identified in two binaries only i.e. male and female. The roots of this marginalization are grounded in the denial of the basic fundamental rights as exposed in the following instances from the selected blogs:

But we can't give an iota of respect to the *transgender community* as they earn their living through means that are unethical.

Those who enter the *transgender community* and adopt the lifestyle of *khwajasira* pay an enormous social, economic, emotional, and moral cost.

For years, to date, Pakistan does not have a reliable estimate of the transgender population living in the country though a few non-governmental organizations have estimated around 0.4 million transgender population in Pakistan as reported by (Tabassum & Jamil, 2014, p. 109). There was a lack of attention and interest towards the social status of, particularly trans-people the option of the third gender was not included in the identity card. Recently, the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) of Pakistan has provided a third-gender option on the Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) registration form as also reported in one of the blogs.

Maida (transgender) was at the NADRA office. She had heard ‘their *people*’ could finally get ID cards.

Issuing a national identity card is no doubt an encouraging step taken by the Pakistani government but, as reported by one of the bloggers,

a mere identity card has not been able to provide these individuals with the *rights* they deserve. Such individuals are often abandoned by their relatives and immediate families at a very early age.

Transgender people are generally found to be more discriminated, harassed, and marginalized than their non-transgender sisters and non-transgender brothers in the country.

The blogs’ discourse invites us to explore the reasons for transgender apartheid in Pakistani society which may lie in the social and cultural habitus comprised of the construction of gender roles. Though the gender roles (roles of males and females) are clearly defined in Pakistani culture; however, in the rigid, and socially constructed heteronormative society of Pakistan, the acceptance of transgender people socially looks difficult as they are not viewed as fitting into the already built norms and patterns of the society. Hence the acceptability is low to the extent that people behave rudely to them and become transphobic (Asghar & Shahzad, 2018). As one of the bloggers noted that:

Gender roles are so rigid and internalized that the mere expression of transgender *identity* is a threat to our heteronormative society. We want to make everyone fit into pre-existing boxes, and when some people do not fit into these boxes and stand out, instead of accommodating them, we become transphobic.

4.2 Maltreatment through labeling Hijra or Khusra identity

Trans people are harassed, mistreated, and are not being accepted by society in general (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019; James et al., 2016). There have been shreds of evidence found from the concordance lines of the corpus analyzed in the current study indicating how the Pakistani society treats transgender people as being a downtrodden minority. Besides being abused mentally and physically as reported by the blogs sexually trans individuals are labeled as *kbursa* and *hijra* associating with negative connotations which is generally considered offensive by transgender individuals in Pakistan (Pamment, 2019).

facilities are not provided to them on the basis of them being *transgender* or *hijras*, as they are most commonly referred.

In recent years, many members of the *transgender* community were molested, abused, abducted, tortured and even assassinated

Hijras, negatively connotated, as expressed by one of the bloggers, are usually found with *a thick coat of red lipstick and cheap face powder* on their faces to reflect their gender role. People *hoot, whistle, and curse* them. They face maltreatment to the extent that one of the bloggers mentioned derogatory remarks of a *kbamajasara* about herself. However, labelling as *kburas* or *hijras* is considered a positive expression of pride within in-group discourses of transgender people as reported by Pamment (2019).

4.3 Khwajasara identity

Acceptance of gender as only male and female is *an over-simplification of gender and clinically wrong* (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Monro, 2005; West & Festenmaker, 1995).

Currently, gender roles, gender expression, gender identity, and sexual orientation are also discussed and evaluated on a broad human spectrum of psychology and sociology. Psychologists, sociologists, and linguists agree to introspect gender roles with a wide array of human behaviour. Moreover, human behaviour plays a vital role in constructing the identity of transgender in society. In the last few decades, transgender sexual orientation and roles restrict them to only begging, prostitution, and dancing in Pakistan (Tabassum & Jamil, 2014). However, the Subcontinent has a history of assigning cherished roles to *khawajasaras* in Mughal courts (Pamment, 2019) as communicated by a blogger that:

khawajasaras held the important job of communicating between male and female sections of the court and were treated with dignity and respect. In the last few decades, however, their role in *society* has been mostly limited to dancing, begging, and prostitution.

4.4 Identity as dancers, sex workers, and jester

The selected blogs represent Pakistani transgender people as ‘nothing more than a ‘laughing stock’ for our society’. They are teased, mocked, taunted, and ridiculed knowingly and unknowingly. To live in a society is just like ‘walking on the burning coals’ for them as reported by the bloggers.

Usually, there are very few opportunities for transgender people to become part of the mainstream of society through employment in public and private sector organizations. Hence, they start working as a dancer in wedding ceremonies, birthday parties, or any other occasion (see the example from the blog below) and therefore called sometimes ‘dancing queens’ (Roy, 2015) in Pakistan.

Most members of the *transgender* community still dance and sing at social celebrations such as marriages

They become a *laughing stock* for the audience. Some transgender people are working as sex workers to earn meals which are the only options left for them by society (Usman et al., 2018). Most transgender people live in areas away from urban areas with their *Guru* who trains them for their professional life as dancers usually and as sex workers or jesters.

4.5 Religious identity of trans people

Besides socio-economic apartheid, transgenders are marginalized religiously in Pakistan (Saeed et al., 2018; Paul, 2018) and some other parts of the world also though the trans individuals express their strong religious and spiritual bonding with religion. The corpus-driven results of the current study also reveal the exclusion of transgenders in Pakistan from a religious perspective as can be seen from one of the blogger’s comment below:

Transgender *persons* are mocked when they enter religious places and hence a safe place for them to offer their prayers was direly needed.

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Therefore, we believe their religious identity is at stake to the extent that they even are doubted to be a Muslim in Pakistan. Their identity as Muslim is viewed with a cynical attitude in Pakistan (Paul, 2018). As they are generally not considered a part of the mainstream of society, they also face problems in demonstrating their right of religious freedom such as practicing the rituals of Islam (ibid) i.e. *Haj* and *Ummrah* are not allowed to perform as reported by one of the bloggers (See example below)

Saudi government imposing a ban on the transgender *community* from performing Hajj and Umrah.

The situation becomes more unfortunate when transgender people are marginalized even after their death. The burial ceremony of the dead trans individuals happens just among in-group members of transgender people. This banishment further keeps them sidelined from the mainstreaming and causes further social division.

Furthermore, in Islamic states such as Pakistan, inheritance laws are followed for the distribution of inheritance. According to the laws of inheritance of Pakistan, *male transgender* (born with male like genital organs) individuals is eligible for a male share while *female transgender* (born with female like genital organs) person is eligible for a female share. The persons having unclear identities are eligible to get an average of male and female shares. Unfortunately, transgender people remain deprived of their share in the inheritance because of their separation from their family members, as one of the bloggers states:

Most transgender *people* are left out of inheritance because of estrangement from family members who typically disapprove or violently negate a person's identity if it differs from CIS male or CIS female.

5. Solidarity towards transgender identity

The findings of the current study not only presented the identity issues of transgenders but the results also show solidarity discourse for transgender individuals in Pakistan as represented through blogs. The demonstration of solidarity towards transgender people has been expressed by some of the bloggers by offering sustainable solutions to the issues of transgender people in the country. For example, the issue of employability has been suggested to be resolved by allocating a 3% reserved quota in the public sector organization of the country as shown in the following instance:

The prospects of getting white-collar jobs are marginal therefore 3% of seats must be reserved for the transgender *community*.

I would love to see them appointed as military personnel or *government* officials.

Another valuable suggestion is building the pools of skills of transgender people in Pakistan: a detailed mapping of the skills set and the challenges they face may be designed in all provinces of Pakistan *which will enable the government to take corrective measures to improve the quality of life of transgender people* (statement of a blogger). Moreover, transgender people may be selected according to their skills, choices, and competencies in various employment sectors of Pakistan. Awareness about the challenges in various walks of life would help to resolve the issues and problems faced by transgender persons in Pakistan.

The boundary of social apathy has finally created an environment of debarring transgender people from social, political, cultural, and economic spheres of society. Although, a few bloggers proposed the idea of constructing separate educational institutes for transgender people this is not the solution to the issues and problems faced by them. However, some awareness campaigns may be conducted on various forums and places, especially in educational institutes to create a sense of respect and acceptance for transgender people. Moreover, some bloggers also appreciated the steps taken by the Pakistani government (see the example below).

In a country like *Pakistan*, where there is now an increasing number of conservatives and religious extremists, I believe these are bold steps taken by the government.

6. Conclusion

Media representation of transgender people is subjected to physical, mental, psychological, and sexual demeaning in many countries including Pakistan. The corpus-driven analysis of blogs written by Pakistanis reveals that transgender identity is marginalized as an “other group” and not considered as a part of the whole community. These individuals are being mistreated to the extent that they not only become a *laughing stock* for the people at matrimonial ceremonies, childbirth, and other events. Words like “khursa” and “hijra” are used to abuse them. They are not only facing an identity crisis at the social level, their religious identity is also at stake as reported by the bloggers. Their religious identity represented by the bloggers cynical as revealed from the findings of the

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current study. Their faith in religion i.e. Islam is challenged usually in Pakistan and some other Muslim countries also, for example, they face problems to worship in the mosques and they are being banned from performing *Hajj* and *Ummrah* as reported in the analysis of the current study. Such dismissal further keeps them side-lined from the mainstreaming. Moreover, maltreatment has been raised to the extent that they even faced sexual harassment and gang-raped.

Considering the current development related to the rights of transgender people in Pakistan, different governmental/non-governmental organizations are working for their rights and identity recognition. They can enjoy the facility of free education in many educational institutes. Moreover, Acts, (Protection of Rights Act 2017 and Protection of Rights Act 2018) have been passed to protect the rights of transgender people in Pakistan. The study depicts that Pakistani bloggers have shown solidarity towards transgender population and raised their voices for their rights and also provide some solutions to improve their social status in Pakistan as well as worldwide.

Methodologically, the examination of the word list, collocates, and concordance lines allows us to explore the broader sense of meanings in various contexts. Multiple themes can be extracted and considered for analysis; however, the excessive demonstration of themes may not allow focusing on all the themes in detail. Further studies can be conducted to elaborate more themes such as the rights of transgender, commonly held belief about the trans community, myths about *hijras*, problems faced by transgender in Pakistan, opportunities to work, and facilities to get an education. In sum, the bloggers' representation of transgender people in Pakistan is multifarious. On the one hand, they are represented as sex workers and criminals and on the other empathetic discourse has been found by highlighting the problems faced by them. Moreover, the study proffers an insight to linguists in general and corpus linguists, in particular, to extend theoretical conceptualization, application of linguistic methods and corpus linguistic techniques to highlight the issues/problems faced by transgender people.

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