

Reiterated Biographical Epistemes: A Grounded Theory Study of Miss #fatimajinnah #motherofthenation

Abstract

This is a study on Miss Fatima Jinnah, one of the leading female figures of the Pakistan Movement, and also a sister and close companion of the founder of Pakistan, Mr Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Constructive grounded theory method is used to generate a substantive theoretical understanding of the hashtags #fatimajinnah, #pakistanmovement, #rolemodel among others, across Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. The users show a spontaneity of love and reverence for Miss Jinnah and view her as the #motherofthenation. The study is an endeavor to prompt an effective use of social media via hashtags rather than relying on repetition without substance. The theoretical formulation is: “Hashtags unless supplemented with pertinent information presented in a systematic way, lose their punch: the portrayal of Miss #fatimajinnah across Twitter, Instagram and Facebook shows the nation’s deep reverence but fails to propagate her values and teachings to the social media users”.

INTRODUCTION

This research project is based on how Miss Fatima Jinnah (1893-1967) is portrayed in select social media networks viz Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Data from these sites are collected with the help of the hashtag, a symbol that is used with key topics to garner a wider coverage and accessibility. Miss Fatima Jinnah was not only a sister and companion of the founder of the Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, but played an important and active role in the politics of Pakistan both during the life and after the death of the Quaid. It would not be amiss to acknowledge her importance in the cultural and political entity of the country even today - fifty-three years after her death. As such it is only befitting to conduct a study on how she is portrayed on Pakistani social media. Since not much can be found on Miss Jinnah as a way of academic research using social media data, a grounded theory method (GTM) is employed in this project. This method aims at theory generation, and is used in situations “where little is already known, or to provide a fresh slant on existing knowledge”. Grounded theory method as “an interpretivist mode of enquiry” is dependent on “language, gestures, expressions and actions” (Goulding, 1998, p. 51) for understanding a social phenomenon. The details of the method are explained in the section titled methodology. Kathy Charmaz (2006), an architect of a variant of grounded theory method, writes that “[t]hese concepts give you initial ideas to pursue and sensitize you to ask particular kinds of questions about your topic” (2006, p. 16). Sensitizing knowledge is what a grounded theorist starts with but may not necessarily end at. It is the knowledge that already exists in the research environment in which the project is taking place. This project starts with three sensitizing

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perspectives: how Miss Fatima Jinnah is viewed in the society given her already established status, the place of language in social media research and a view put forward by Silvana K. Figueroa-Dreher (2008) regarding the study of audio-visual data in a grounded theory study. Armed with the disciplinary knowledge, I enter the research site.

Sensitizing knowledge

Miss Fatima Jinnah

Reza Pirbhai (2017), the celebrated biographer on Miss Jinnah notes that in Pakistan, public places like educational institutions, hospitals, parks etc. are “festooned” with the name of Miss Fatima Jinnah testifying to the reverence in which she is held by the Pakistani nation. She was not only the first ever First Lady of Pakistan but was conferred the loftier title of Madar-i-Millat or Mother of the Nation. It is a commonly documented fact that Miss Fatima Jinnah was “a professional dentist and an unveiled social worker” (2017, p.2). Pirbhai further writes (p.3) that most historians writing about the Pakistan Movement often neglect to give due mention to the crucial role of women. Therefore, there should be an effort at “gendering” the accounts surrounding the creation of Pakistan. Fatima Jinnah and her close associates are bound to find a prominent place in a gendered history of the country (2017, p.3) if it is ever written.

Another study carried out by Zaheer & Chawla (2019, p. 46) informs that the title “Mother of the Nation” was given to Miss Jinnah in 1947 and that the Pakistani nation loved and supported her. This study also notes that the historians often ignored her populist appeal in a conservative society. She played a significant role in the Pakistan movement and turned inactive after the death of her brother.

Three points emerge from these citations. Firstly, there is a consensus amongst most researchers/historians that the title “Mother of the Nation” is the most frequently cited title when it comes to Miss Fatima Jinnah. Secondly, despite the nation’s reverence for Miss Fatima Jinnah, most mainstream historical accounts are not gendered in the sense that they do not dwell on the efforts of women in a prominent way. Women are portrayed as standing a step behind the menfolk. They are not referenced independently but always in the context of men. Thirdly, there is no research on Fatima Jinnah as portrayed on social media. These three points serve as sensitizing knowledge regarding Miss Fatima Jinnah.

Language and social media

As this project is based on data taken from three social media sites viz Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, it is instructive to take stock of the existing knowledge in this regard. Social media are defined as “forms of electronic communication” for sharing “information, ideas, personal messages, and other content” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020). Taprial and Kanwar (2012, p.8) in their book define social media in the following way: “Social media is the media that allows one to be *social* or get social online by sharing content, news, photos, etc. with other people”. The main intent seems to be to socialize digitally. Another research study conducted by Larissa Hjorth and Sam Hinton (2019, p. 37) concludes that social media is “situated within national, cultural and political environments which means that social

media has evolved in different ways in different countries”. The writers exhort scholars in the West not to miss the fact how social media is used in the East as it would not give a complete picture of the way the phenomenon of the internet is evolving. This is important for my research in two ways. Firstly, the western theories/practices may not be wholly practical to the study of social media everywhere in the world. Secondly, this automatically raises the need for indigenous theoretical and methodological frameworks. In other words, researchers in the East should not shy away from developing their own scheme of things rather than relying on importing ideas.

Since this project aims to theoretically understand how the personality of Miss Fatima Jinnah is presented primarily through language (there are some images involved also, making this a multimodal study), a perspective on language use is in order here. Page, Barton, Unger & Zappavigna (2014, p. 26) point to the need for redefining the concept of language as it is used on social media. They place “language within a wider semiotic system that also involves image, sound and kinetic resources found typically in digital interaction”. They also report that “[m]uch mainstream linguistic research has largely ignored social media to date” which sits well with the aim of the project in hand. Page, Barton, Unger & Zappavigna (2014, p. 27) also point to the act of sharing “norms and values” through social media. Users perform identity acts through sharing content however they like to. It needs to be pointed out that most people sharing content on Miss Fatima Jinnah have no outside obligation to do so. Larissa Hjorth and Sam Hinton (2019) further inform us that the existing frameworks may or may not prove to be adequate for studying social media language and there is a need to remain open to the possibility of generating new frameworks (Page, Barton, Unger & Zappavigna, 2014, p. 93).

The present study uses the symbol hashtag (#) to explore how Miss Jinnah is portrayed on three social media sites. The importance of the hashtag is well-documented in studies on social media (Rauschnabel, Sheldon and Herzfeldt, 2019; Fedushko, Syerov and Kolos, 2019). All research in this regard mentions the ease in the flow of information with the help of a hashtag, since a hashtag acts both as a search and a dissemination tool by organizing information around topics.

There are a number of sensitizing perspectives derived from the above discussion. The first one is that social media allows ordinary folk to share ideas and norms and to connect with like-minded people. The acts of public persuasion are no longer restricted to a select few and as a consequence are not regulated. The second is that language on social media is not used in the traditional sense and needs redefinition in a multimodal capacity. The third is that every country/society uses social media in its own way and therefore, needs separate frameworks to understand the uniqueness of the phenomenon. This all calls for a fresh theoretical formulation which is the aim of the present endeavor.

A methodological sensitizing concept

The last of the sensitizing perspectives that this project uses is methodological rather than theoretical. Figueroa (2008, p.1) claims that the grounded theory method can only be successfully applied to the study of audio-visual data if they are viewed as two different

albeit closely connected and overlapping entities: a lens and a phenomenon. She writes that “the use of audio-visual material as medium (‘window’ or ‘lens’) to analyze other social phenomena will be called the AVM-perspective, whereas the AVO-perspective will designate the use of audio-visual data as the object of analysis” (2008, p. 3). AVM studies the processes involved in producing the material whereas AVO being the lens, studies how this “lens” is constructed. A study of language, images, etc. is involved in the latter type of analysis. According to Figueroa the problem arises while doing grounded theory coding for which she suggests looking at audio-visual data only from the perspective of a phenomenon and not as a lens since it is difficult to code language. The sensitizing perspective derived from this study is that audio-visual data (images and written language included) have to be divided into two types and it is slippery to code language using the grounded theory method.

METHODOLOGY

This research project employs a grounded theory method for studying the social media data which includes language and accompanying images. The view of reality that this multimodal data constructs is the objective of the project in hand. Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss presented grounded theory in 1967 as a method in qualitative research to “forestall the opportunistic use of theories that have a dubious fit and working capacity” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.4). The duo discourage “examplifying” which means looking for instances to validate a theory, and instead advocate rendering a research phenomenon in a new theoretical formation. Glaser and Strauss make it clear that initial grounded theories based on fresh data are “substantive” and not “formal”. Substantive theories are more contextualized and less generalized. A number of substantive theories can be studied together to generate a formal theory that cuts across subjects and disciplines (Zaidi, 2020, p. 53)

A grounded theory study starts like any other research study. There is a problem, or phenomenon that needs to be investigated. In my case, it is the portrayal of Miss Fatima Jinnah across three social media sites. An effort was made to locate extant theories or works, but, as the phenomenon was unique, there was not much methodological or theoretical knowledge directly illuminating the issue under consideration. I collected data through initial sampling by using the hashtag #fatimajinnah. As GTM is an iterative process, data collection continued till no new concept/category emerged.

A finished grounded theory passes through some key stages marked by certain strategies. As the approach taken in this study is a variant of the original grounded theory called constructive grounded theory (ConsGT) (a view that social realities are constructed and are not givens) as propagated by Kathy Charmaz (2006), an initial stage of locating and selecting sensitizing knowledge is added. These sensitizing perspectives are only a point of departure for the process of analysis and must earn their way into the final version. Once this is done, initial coding is carried out. The quest for finding important patterns starts right from the beginning. A researcher initially codes whatever he finds “significant in sections of discourse” (Hadley, 2017, p. 31). The codes may be in gerunds or descriptive language as suits the situation. The next stage is secondary coding or focused coding. As the process is emergent, I remained vigilant for unexpected leads. I selected the most significant of the initial codes and compared and contrasted them with each other and mined more data to get a

better picture of the phenomenon. As this is a language study, I used in vivo codes where needed. In vivo codes consist of the verbatim data and is the language of the participants (Belgrave and Seide, 2019, p. 184). After deliberating on the secondary codes, a category was developed by collapsing several codes into it. The next step is theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation. The emergent category was theoretically sampled in the sense that I went through more data to theoretically saturate the concepts. Theoretical sampling is the second type of sampling done in GTM and is geared towards sampling emerging concepts rather than population. A concept is considered to be saturated when there is nothing new to be found about it. The core category was then compared with the existing disciplinary concepts to refine the emerging substantive theory and finally a theoretical rendering of the phenomenon is presented which is called the substantive theory of the phenomenon.

Findings and Discussion

Initial descriptive coding (#fatimajinnah)

This section starts with the initial descriptive codes. Every description is an abstraction of reality as portrayed in the data selected. The data for the primary stage consist of a total of thirty posts generated by using the hashtag #fatimajinnah. More are added as the process continues. Ten most recent social media posts from Twitter, Facebook and Instagram on Miss Fatima Jinnah are analyzed. The hashtag used for initial codes is #fatimajinnah.

The initial abstractions are based on the language as well as the pictures shared on Instagram. The Instagram accounts are purana_pakistan (2020), uddaari (2020), breccorderlifestyle (2020), aneeslodhi09 (2020), splendid.art (2019), aamiriat (2020), nichelifestyle (2020), capturecrew79 (2020), afsarnama (2020), pakistanarchives (2020).

The abstractions to emerge are:

1. Supervising women exclusive activities: sewing, cutting, etc.
2. Short hair, arresting pose, stylish for her times, girlish/feminine side highlighted
3. Quaid keeping women in the forefront in the Pakistan movement.

A total of top ten Twitter posts were selected from the following accounts: Ahmed Waseem Hashmi (2020), Hafeez Ahmed Ranjha (2020), Bilal (2020), Qurat Ul Ain Tabassum (2020), Shaan (2020), Mir Tamoor Ali Channa (2020), Samina Qasim (2020), Aamir Raja (2020), Anees Khan Lodhi (2020) and Mubeen Ch. (2020). The descriptive codes capturing a slice of reality are:

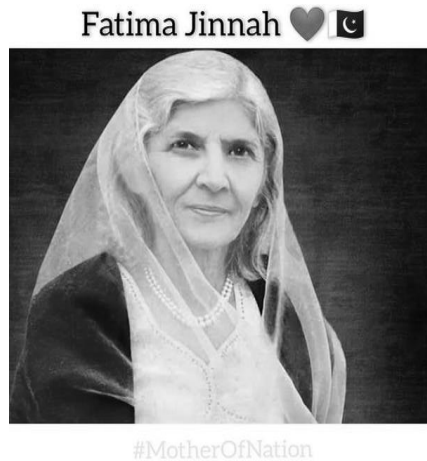
1. Fatima Jinnah brought to bear relevance on current events/politics (PML-N/Malala)
2. Feminine side of Fatima Jinnah alluded to by bringing in Malala.
3. Fatima Jinnah asking women to work alongside men; supported the founder of the nation

Facebook posts selected are from the following accounts using the hashtag #fatimajinnah: Proud Pakistan Awards Inc (2020), American Muslim & Multifaith Women's Empowerment Council (2020), De'Montmorency College of Dentistry (2020), Womanistan (2020), Perveen

Sarwar (2020). NUST (2020), Team Karachi (2020), Tehzeeb Haafi Fan Club (2020), Sultan's Construction & Real Estate Consultant (2020) and Pakistan State Oil (2020). The initial codes for Facebook are:

1. More commercial and targeted posts by interest groups
2. A prayer for Pakistani women to become like her
3. Fatima Jinnah's sense of style is mentioned through #ghararas and #styleidiaries. FJ shaking hands with a man, sitting with a dog.

There are two types of pictures emerging here: a modern FJ and a motherly figure



Secondary descriptive codes (#fatimajinnah, #maryamnawaz; #fatimajinnah, #rolemodel)

There are two sets of hashtags used for secondary abstractions. The hashtag #maryamnawaz was selected along with the core hashtag #fatimajinnah as there was a reference to her being compared to Miss Fatima Jinnah in the previous data set. Maryam Nawaz by leading her father's party has become a strong politician and it seemed befitting to understand how the world of social media reacted to it. There were just five (05) posts visible when these two hashtags were used together. As Instagram can only work with a single hashtag, I used #maryamnawaz to mine data. There were millions of posts using this hashtag. It was not possible for me to go through each and every post separately so I just took the help of the pictures as this is a multimodal study. There were just three pictures that indicated that there could be some relevant material. It was easier to mine data from Facebook as it does not restrict the number of hashtags. There were two posts using these two hashtags. The Twitter accounts for the first set of hashtags are Khawar Akram (2020), Waqas Raja (2020), Sadia Malik (2020), In The News (2017) and Muhammad Obaid Khan (2017). Following are the Instagram accounts that use the two hashtags together: Sameer_write (2020), thefashion_file (2020) and officialmetronome (2020). The two Facebook accounts are: Jubroon (2018) and Samaa TV (2017).

There are four Twitter accounts that use the next set of hashtags (#fatimajinnah, #rolemodel) and they are Diya Mughal (2016), Surraiya Hasan (2018), Gleam Info (2015) and Just Trust Khan (2018). The sole Facebook account is Mahnoor Shahbaz Khan (2015).

The second set of hashtags are #fatimajinnah, #rolemodel. There are four (04) Twitter posts with these two hashtags. There is not a single Instagram post that could be mined as the single hashtag #rolemodel yielded millions of Instagram posts from across the world and the algorithms work in such a way that it was not possible to spot a relevant post without the help of a software. As for Facebook, there is just one post available that has these two hashtags.

Keeping in view the scarcity of the data, two descriptions of the data are generated:

1. Miss Fatima Jinnah is incomparable
2. A motherly figure

The next set of hashtags is #fatimajinnah #rolemodel. After going through the data, it is clear that out of the four Twitter users three suffice at using hashtags like #graceful, #awesome, #respect #love, #Pakistaniwomen, #inspiration. One Twitter and the sole Facebook account, however, provide quotations of Miss Fatima Jinnah giving us a glimpse of her personality. The quotations are "You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream" (Suraiya Hasan, 2018) and "Think a hundred times before you take any decision, but once a decision is taken, stand by it as one man" (Mahnoor Shabaz Khan, 2015). It is pertinent to note that no other information as to when and where Miss Fatima Jinnah uttered these words is provided and social media usage is not regulated (Page, Barton, Unger & Zappavigna, 2014, p. 27).

The above data analysis generated just one secondary abstraction:

A portrayal with repetitive hashtags across the select social media sites. Admittedly this is a clear departure from the descriptive codes but it is necessitated in view of encountering the same data in the form of hashtags and pictures.

Category development (#fatimajinnah, #pakistanmovement)

The next step in the grounded theory method is to generate a category for theoretical sampling and saturation. Due to the repetitive nature of the data (hashtags used by bloggers), the last abstraction "Miss Fatima Jinnah's portrayal with repetitive hashtags across the select social media sites" is raised to the level of category. A category in GTM is a representative for the entire data. This category is theoretically sampled by gathering more data so that a saturation of its features can take place.

Instagram predictably has millions of posts that use the hashtag #womenempowerment. With the help of pictures of Miss Fatima Jinnah, twenty posts were located. And out of the twenty the following accounts were chosen: yehafsanay (2018), officialmetronome (2019), maatitvpk (2020), pakistanfacts1 (2020) and mindseyeentertainment (2020). Most of these accounts have information (again repetitive) on the Quaid and Miss Fatima Jinnah is in the background.

There are only nine (9) Twitter posts that carry these two hashtags. There are, however, 110 posts with the hashtag #pakistanmovement. The accounts are KalabaghDam (2019),

Womenpreneurs50 (2018), Syed Khurram Shahzad (2017), PeacefulPakistan (2018) and Afzaal Akram Gujjar (2017).

The situation on Facebook is no different: 15 posts for #fatimajinnah #pakistanmovement out of which 6 are by one account and only one is actually about her. The others are for other figures. The Facebook accounts are 6th Sense Group - Pvt.Ltd (2020), Sitara Hilal Foundation (2020), Peaceful Pakistan (2018), Believe Network (2020) and Pakistan Movement (2018). There are 204 Facebook posts that use the hashtag #pakistanmovement but only 61 that have some information (even repetitive) regarding the movement. The rest use it to garner more traffic.

As is evident from the above analysis, there is a scarcity of relevant data on the three social media sites using the hashtag #Fatimajinnah in conjunction with other hashtags like #pakistanmovement, #rolemodel. Even when #fatimajinnah was used, no new or credible information came to the surface. It is evident that year after year the same information is given and social media bloggers feel content in wishing her a happy birthday. The love for the lady is visible in all posts. Hashtags like #dedicatedherlifetoPakistan, #rolemodel, #Madar-e-Millat, #happybirthday, #leadingfigure, #graceful, #awesome, #love, #dentalsurgeon, #sisterofthefounder, #respect, etc. are repeated on her birthday (July 9) and death anniversary (July 31) every year by different bloggers. There are some posts that are at least five years old. There is just one blogger on Instagram and Twitter (Anees Lodhi, 2019) who repeated his post on both sites otherwise there seems to be just one post per user.

The iterative process of abstracting data makes sense of the reality: “Hashtags unless supplemented with pertinent information presented in a systematic way, lose their punch: the portrayal of Miss #fatimajinnah across Twitter, Instagram and Facebook shows the nation’s deep reverence but fails to propagate her values and teachings to the social media users”.

Conclusion and recommendations

The research project is concluded in this section. Important insights have emerged through this exercise. Social media can be used more effectively to disseminate values and teachings of the founders of Pakistan. The media is being used for channeling politics in Pakistan but it can be used for nation building also. An effort needs to be made to share thoughts of Pakistan Movement’s leading figures with the ordinary public. Moreover, a gendered account of the Pakistan Movement can be built and disseminated with the help of social media. It is an effective tool but is under-utilized. It can be mainstreamed and made official. More scholarly endeavors are needed in this area from all social sciences disciplines and a theoretical and methodological convergence be sought.

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