



**THE PERVASIVE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE
ANALYSIS OF Umera Ahmed's ZINDAGI GULZAR HAI**

Rabia Khan

Elementary School Teacher (EST) English, GGHSS, Hassan Abdal, Attock, Pakistan

Khanrabia444@gmail.com

Nisar Ali

English Lecturer (Adjunct), International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan

nisarali966@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the influence of social media-like discourses in by Umera Ahmed's Zindagi Gulzar Hai (2012), focusing on their role in shaping identity, interpersonal relationships, and societal expectations. The study employs Critical Discourse Analysis as a theoretical framework, to conducts a close textual analysis by exploring how communicative patterns and social interactions in the novel parallel dynamics commonly associated with contemporary social media. Although the narrative does not explicitly incorporate digital platforms, it reflects key features of mediated communication, including misinterpretation, social comparison, and the construction of public image. These elements resemble the ways individuals engage and present themselves in modern online environments. The study further contextualizes these insights by drawing comparisons with current social media practices in Pakistan, particularly among younger populations. The study suggests that the novel anticipates many of the complexities associated with digital communication, demonstrating that technological platforms intensify rather than transform existing social structures and the continued relevance of literary texts in understanding the evolving relationship between communication, society, and identity in the digital age.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Class disparity, Identity construction, Interpersonal communication, Pakistani Society, Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Umera Ahmed, Social media discourse, Digital culture.

INTRODUCTION

Social media have developed at a quick speed for a decade or so. According to the website statista.com's report from the social media users are about 2.6 billion in the whole world. While in the year 2010 there were only 1 billion users of social media. This comparison is wonderful. It is further expected that this figure of the users of social media is likely to cross 3 billion in the year 2021. In addition this report asserts that there are 71% people are those who use social media and the users of Facebook excel all of these, so facebook is the leader of social media applications whose active users are totally 1.86 billion. Social media has inexorably become a fundamental element of the current classroom, of public relations and advertising industries, of the political campaigning, and also of certain other aspects of everyday life the common folk. Even the house wives of varying ages use all of these frequently. The social media not only provides information regarding current issues, it provides knowledge regarding kitchen, religion and suggests suitable matches for wedding. Thus it has become an integral part of all of us and its use is definitely unavoidable.

In 21st century, the social media has reformed the methods of communication of public relations, the way they share information, and also the way they identify their social identities. Social media indeed represents a updated technology that inevitably facilitates and informs people to share ideas and information by digital networking. Its role is to serves as an imperative tool which can facilitate people to supervise their point in time in an effective way in the current world which fast-pace. Its invasive presence in our day by day lives is obvious, whose users range from children to the adults. However, where social media offers frequent



advantages, it gives rise to certain psychological challenges. The current research investigates the influence of social media as presented in Umera Ahmed's novel *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* (2012). It highlights its effect on identity, relationships, and also societal dynamics.

Moreover, The novel provides a deep examination of these themes, predominantly within Pakistani context. The present research aims at analyzing the portrayal of social media as used in the novel and its further inferences for individuals and societal relationships. This research employs critical discourse analysis and compares the narrative with real-life social media trends in Pakistan. This study seeks to explicate the multifaceted effects of social media as depicted in Umera Ahmed's work.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has the following objectives:

- To explore all-encompassing presence of social media in the novel written by Umera Ahmed's *Zindagi Gulzar Hai*
- To explore novel's impact on individuals, relationships, as well as on society
- To evaluate how does real-life social media trends and the issues in Pakistan provides a context to evaluate the portrayal of social media in novel

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 The Role of Social Media in a Society

Emergence of social media has changed communication and dealings in a quite profound way. Scholars have discussed its role in shaping public opinion, fostering community engagement, and influencing cultural norms (Boulianne, 2015; Papacharissi, 2010). The social media is viewed as a double-faceted sword as it promotes connectivity, it may also contribute to the issues such as cyberbullying, misinformation, and the erosion of privacy (Tufekci, 2017). Thus social media has emerged as a sharp weapon which has power to modify and shape certain social views and it also develops connection among the whole community. It also has changed communication and dealings a great deal.

3.2 Social Media and Identity Formation

Many researchers have indicated that social media plays a decisive function in construction of identity as well as negotiation. Individuals curate their online qualities in the course of selective sharing, which time and again leads to create a break up between their real-life and virtual personality (Goffman, 1959; Turkle, 2011). In Pakistani society, social media serves as a platform for both societal critique and self-expression. It further enables the users of social media to steer complex cultural landscapes (Awan & Zia, 2020). Thus social media facilitates the users of social media to navigate multifaceted cultural settings. It can also be said that the social media shapes thoughts and modifies the mindset of the society.

3.3 Literature as a Reflection of Society

Literature often tends to serve as a mirror to values and societal norms and provides insight into current issues. The intersection of social media and literature has acquired concentration, with the scholars to examine how narratives are a reflection and how they critique social media's insidious influence (Kaur, 2018). Thus, Umera Ahmed's "*Zindagi Gulzar Hai*" (2012) is an important text that addresses such themes within the Pakistani context. It has many aspects of the language of social media which reveals the fact that the writer herself frequently uses social media that is why her writings provide a clear proof that she herself is the writer of modern era.

3.4 Societal Norms and Critique



In order to critique societal norms surrounding gender roles, Umera Ahmed uses social media in her novel *Zindagi Gulzar Hai*. She further portrays class divisions and the pursuit of happiness by using such language. The online personas of the characters often have a clash with their offline realities, illuminating the inconsistencies between societal expectations and individual ambitions. This type of themes mainly show relevance in the Pakistani context, where social media can serve as a platform for activism and social change, challenging entrenched norms.

Turkle (2011) discovers the absurdity of modern connectivity through the use of technology, further arguing that although social media and digital communication tools ostensibly bring people closer, they often bring about a deep sense of isolation. Turkle (2011) says that the individuals increasingly have reliance on technology for camaraderie and emotional fulfillment, leading to superficial interactions that lack the depth of face-to-face communication. She examines the way this dependence affects identity formation, personal relationships and also societal norms, suggesting that the digital age fosters an environment where people are more contented presenting curated versions of themselves rather than engaging authentically. The insights of Turkle are chiefly relevant to the analysis of contemporary literature, including works like Umera Ahmed's *Zindagi Gulzar Hai*, as they illustrate the complex dynamics between technology, identity, and human connection in the digital era. Her critical perspective invites a deeper understanding of the emotional and psychological implications of social media on individuals and communities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The research applies the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which tends to focus on the connections which exist between language, social context and power. In *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* (2012), language serves not only to tell a story but also to reflect and shape social realities surrounding social media.

4.2 Analytical Focus of the study

The current research examines the following aspects:

a. Language Use

It examines specific dialogues as well as narrative descriptions wherever the characters interact through social media. For instance, it analyzes how Kashaf's social media posts disclose her internal struggles and societal anxiety.

b. Power Dynamics

It further investigates the way characters for instance Kashaf and her friends navigate social hierarchies through social media.

c. Identity and Representation

It analyzes the depiction of varying identities within social context of media. How do characters present themselves online versus their real-life interactions? For example, consider a scene where Kashaf curates her online persona in contrast to her offline struggles.

d. Textual Examples

It tends to identify the passages that demonstrate relationships of characters with social media. For example, when Kashaf receives negative comments on her posts, how does this affect her self-esteem and identity? Additionally analyze the implications of social media interactions for themes of friendship, love and societal prospects, highlighting the language used in these exchanges. Thus the focus of the analysis is on the language in interaction with



media and it tends to analyse how the language is shaped by social media and how the way of thinking is presented by the use of language.

4.3 Sandra Boulianne's Social Media and Public Participation

Boulianne's (2015) research on the role of social media in public participation provides valuable insight into how platforms facilitate community engagement and reshape the nature of relationships. According to her, social media platforms offer spaces for both personal and public spheres to overlap, influencing the way individuals perceive themselves within a community. This overlap is mirrored in *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* (2012), where characters experience external pressures to present curated versions of themselves that conform to societal norms. Although the novel does not directly engage with social media, the underlying presence of public perception, social media's effects suggests a critique of how technology reshapes relational dynamics. Through Boulianne's framework, the novel can be seen as addressing the implicit demands of digital culture, where characters like Kashaf and Zaron struggle to balance personal identity with the public's expectations. Social media, as an extension of public participation, shapes relationships by influencing how individuals express their desires, opinions, and worth.

Moreover, the research by Zizi Papacharissi (2010) i.e. "Social Media's Transformation of Communication and Community" Papacharissi's work is fundamental in understanding the way the social media changes the communication landscape and, as a result how the communities are built and maintained. Her investigation of the mixing of individual and public spheres is predominantly applicable to Ahmed's *Zindagi Gulzar Hai*, where the characters are frequently caught between their personal strives and communal pressures. Papacharissi further highlights that the social media serves a tool for association and the stage for presentation, where relationships are constructed and maintained based on external validation. By drawing on the works of Boulianne and Papacharissi, the study will argue that social media, though not overtly present in *Zindagi Gulzar Hai*, is symbolically represented through the societal dynamics of the novel. The relationships depicted are mediated by external validation, public perception, and the characters' need to balance personal authenticity with societal roles, issues central to the discourse on social media's pervasive influence on modern relationships.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Umera Ahmed's *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* (2012) presents a nuanced exploration of interpersonal relationships, class stratification, and individual resilience within a socially regulated environment. Although the narrative predates the widespread institutionalization of digital networking platforms, its thematic concerns can be critically reinterpreted through the lens of contemporary social media culture. The text implicitly reflects communicative patterns, identity negotiations, and social pressures that closely resemble those produced and intensified by modern digital ecosystems. This section offers a detailed analysis of these parallels, situating the novel within present-day socio-digital realities.

5.1 Social Media's Impact on Relationships

Social media serves up as an instrument to connect and create misunderstanding among characters in the novel. The relationships are both strained as well as fostered through the at the platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp etc. For example, the central character, i.e. Kashaf, navigates her friendships and romantic interests through online contacts, which over and over again lead to misunderstandings and emotional turmoil. For instance, Kashaf reflects in her



diary that she has “learned to remain silent because expressing too much only leads to disappointment” (2012) which signals her reluctance to engage openly. This internalized silence contributes to relational distance. These depictions present a similarity with the real-life experiences of a lot of young individuals in Pakistan, where social media is considered a primary means of communication.

The integration of social media into everyday life has redefined the ways in which individuals relate to each other, affecting personal connections and larger societal relationships. In Umera Ahmed’s *Zindagi Gulzar Hai*, social media’s influence is subtly woven into the narrative, reflecting broader cultural changes. By examining how characters in the novel navigate relationships under the shadow of societal expectations, this section explores how social media acts as an unseen force that shapes interpersonal dynamics.

In the novel, social media's role in shaping relationships is not as openly prominent, but there are broader themes in the story that touch on how societal perceptions, class, and communication influence relationships. In a modern context, social media can be paralleled with how society's expectations and gossip affect characters’ interactions. Here are some examples that could be understood as having an impact similar to social media in today's world:

5.2 Social Comparison and Class Differences

Zaroon and Kashaf are from different social classes, and most of their early conversations cause misinterpretations. In the world of today, the social media most often strengthens this kind of social contrast, where people display idealized versions of their lives. Kashaf repeatedly articulates her awareness of socio-economic inequality, noting that “people like Zaroon live in a world where problems are luxuries, not necessities” (2012) This encapsulates her skepticism toward privilege and shapes her defensive disposition. Zaroon originally misinterprets and underestimates Kashaf due to her background, while Kashaf harbors a quite negative view of the privileged class represented by Zaroon. This tension could be likened to how people judge others based on their online personas or appearances on social media. The societal expectations and class divides act as an analogue in the context of the novel, The characters are forced to navigate these social performances, not through digital platforms, but through similar pressures of self-presentation and image management. Zaroon’s charm and privilege, for instance, contrast with Kashaf’s pragmatic and guarded persona, yet both must constantly reconcile their private desires with the public roles they are expected to play. Papacharissi’s analysis of social media’s role in reshaping communication mirrors this tension, where Ahmed critiques the performative nature of relationships in contemporary society.

5.3 Public Image and Reputation

The construction and maintenance of public image emerge as significant concerns within the narrative. The importance of social perception is evident in the scrutiny surrounding Zaroon’s behavior. His mother’s concern that his interactions with women may “damage the family’s respectability” (2012) highlighting the weight assigned to public image. This reflects a social environment where reputation is collectively negotiated rather than individually owned. Zaroon’s interactions with women are frequently scrutinized, leading to reputational implications that extend beyond his private intentions. His mother’s apprehensions regarding his conduct underscore the importance of social perception and familial honor. In the context of digital culture, reputation is similarly shaped through visibility and audience interpretation. Social media platforms function as spaces where individual behavior is constantly observed,



evaluated, and discussed. Zaron's situation parallels the contemporary phenomenon in which online activities contribute to the formation of a public persona, often detached from nuanced reality. Kashaf, in contrast, consciously cultivates an image of independence and emotional restraint. Her self-presentation reflects a strategic negotiation of societal expectations, akin to how individuals curate their identities in online environments to align with desired perceptions. The Characters actively manage their outward personas, a phenomenon comparable to identity curation on Facebook, where individuals strategically present themselves to align with societal expectations.

5.4 Gossip and Misinformation

Rumor and speculation play a critical role in shaping character relationships within the novel. Speculation and unverified assumptions significantly influence character relationships. Zaron's suspicion regarding Kashaf's association with Osama is not grounded in direct evidence but emerges from insecurity and external impressions. He admits feeling disturbed by "what he thinks he sees," (2012) rather than what is explicitly confirmed. Zaron's suspicion regarding Kashaf's association with Osama is driven not by verified information but by conjecture and insecurity. This reliance on incomplete or distorted knowledge contributes to relational discord. Such dynamics closely resemble the circulation of misinformation in digital spaces, where unverified content can rapidly influence opinions and behaviors. Social media platforms often facilitate the انتشار (spread) of rumors, leading to misunderstandings and conflict. The narrative thus anticipates the consequences of information distortion, highlighting the fragility of trust in environments where communication is indirect and mediated by external influences

5.5 Communication Gaps

One of the central themes in the novel is the communication gap between Zaron and Kashaf. While they both have feelings for each other, they struggle to express them due to their own pride and past experiences. The relationship between Kashaf and Zaron is their inability to articulate emotions effectively. Kashaf admits that she has "built walls that even she cannot easily cross," reflecting her emotional guardedness. Zaron, despite his confidence, struggles to express sincerity, often resorting to indirect or dismissive language. Social media, while meant to enhance communication, can often lead to miscommunication or lack of deeper connection. Their misunderstandings could be compared to how indirect communication through social media platforms (like texting or posts) can sometimes create confusion or fail to express genuine emotions. While novel doesn't feature social media explicitly, the dynamics of relationships portrayed can easily be compared to the impact of social media in today's relationships, especially regarding perceptions, communication barriers, and the influence of public opinion.

5.6 Shaping Identity Through Social Media

Kashaf's character development illustrates the complexities of identity formation within a socially constrained environment. Kashaf's introspective narrative voice provides insight into her evolving sense of self. She frequently questions her worth and societal position, noting that "self-respect is the only asset she truly possesses" (2012) this emphasis on dignity reflects her effort to construct an identity independent of external validation. Her internal reflections reveal a continuous negotiation between personal aspirations and societal expectations. When examined through a modern perspective, this process parallels the construction of identity in digital spaces. Moreover, Social media platforms provide



opportunities for self-expression while simultaneously imposing normative pressures. Individuals are encouraged to present idealized versions of themselves, often leading to a tension between authenticity and conformity. Kashaf's journey embodies this struggle, as she seeks to assert her individuality without deviating from socially acceptable boundaries.

5.7 Social Media Usage in Pakistan

Pakistan has witnessed a dramatic increase in social media usage over the past decade, with platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter becoming integral to daily life. According to a report by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), the number of social media users in the country has surpassed 50 million, primarily among the youth demographic (PTA, 2022). This growing engagement with social media mirrors the experiences depicted in *Zindagi Gulzar Hai*.

5.8 Societal Issues Reflected in the Novel

The novel's exploration of social media dynamics is further illuminated when compared to real-life issues faced by Pakistani society. Cyber bullying, online harassment, and the pressure to conform to idealized lifestyles are prevalent themes in both the narrative and actual social media interactions. The character's experiences resonate with the challenges faced by individuals navigating these digital landscapes, highlighting the urgent need for digital literacy and awareness.

5.9 Activism and Social Media

Digital platforms have emerged as significant أدوات (tools) for social and political engagement, enabling individuals to voice concerns and mobilize collective action. Movements such as MeToo movement illustrate the transformative potential of social media in challenging entrenched power structures. This phenomenon is echoed in *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* (2012), where characters seek empowerment and agency through their online presence. While the novel does not explicitly depict activism in a digital context, its emphasis on personal agency and resistance to societal constraints reflects similar ideals. Kashaf's intellectual independence and moral conviction can be interpreted as forms of subtle resistance, aligning with contemporary expressions of empowerment facilitated by online platforms.

CONCLUSION

The study has examined that the novel retains significant analytical value when interpreted within the framework of contemporary digital culture. Although composed prior to the widespread entrenchment of social networking platforms, the text offers a profound engagement with themes that closely correspond to present-day concerns surrounding mediated communication, identity construction, and social stratification. Its narrative structure and character development illuminate patterns of interaction that are now more visibly enacted within technologically driven environments. Through Critical Discourse Analysis, this study has highlighted the ideological formations related to class, gender, and societal expectations and the relational tensions between characters, particularly those shaped by misinterpretation, emotional restraint, and unequal social positioning, parallel the communicative challenges observed in digital spaces. In this sense, the text does not merely reflect interpersonal conflict but reveals the discursive mechanisms through which such conflicts are produced and sustained.

Furthermore, the study has highlighted that contemporary social media platforms have not fundamentally transformed human relationships; rather, they have amplified pre-existing social dynamics by accelerating the circulation of information, intensifying visibility, and



reinforcing systems of judgment and comparison. The issues of perception, reputation, and self-presentation depicted in the novel resonate strongly with the performative nature of online identity, where individuals continuously negotiate between authenticity and societal approval. By situating the novel within the socio-cultural context of modern Pakistan, the discussion also underscores its continued relevance in understanding the intersection of tradition and modernity. The technological developments, while transformative in form, remain deeply rooted in longstanding social and ideological structures. The experiences of the characters reflect broader societal tensions that are now increasingly mediated through digital platforms, particularly among younger populations navigating evolving norms and expectations.

REFERENCES

- Awan, U., & Zia, A. (2020). The role of social media in shaping identity in Pakistan: A sociological perspective. *Journal of Media Studies*, 35(2), 45–60.
- Boulianne, S. (2015). Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis of current research. *Communication Research*, 42(5), 627–650. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650212465075>
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press.
- Kaur, R. (2018). Literature and social media: The changing landscape of storytelling. *Literature and Society Journal*, 22(3), 75–90.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2010). *A private sphere: Democracy in a digital age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA). (2022). *Social media statistics*. Islamabad: Author.
- Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. New York: Basic Books.
- Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Umera Ahmed. (2012). *Zindagi Gulzar Hai*. Lahore: Ferozsons.